Towards Understanding the Qur`an

Vol. I

SURAHS 1-3

English version of

Tafhim al-Qur`an

SAYYID ABUL A`LA MAWDUDI

Translated and Edited by
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To

my father

Muhammad Zafar Ahmad Ansari

in love, gratitude, and respect.

Contents

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Consonants. Arabic

initial: unexpressed
medial and final: ء ʼ

		د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع		ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

Urdu and Persian the same except the following:

پ	p	ڈ	d̲	ژ	z̲
ٹ	t̲				
چ	ch	ڑ	r̲	گ	g

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

short: ـَ a; ـِ i; ـُ u.

long: ـَا ā ـُو ū ـِي ī ـِيّ īy

diphthongs: ـَوْ aw

ـَيْ ay

Foreword

Islam is unique by virtue of the fact that it is a religion based on a Book – the Qur'ān. In the same way that the Islamic *Ummah*, whose identity and historical personality have been derived from and fashioned by the Qur'ān, is unique so is Muslim culture and civilization. No influence has been greater than the Qur'ān in shaping the spirit and ethos of Muslim culture and civilization. If we look at the long history of religions and civilizations, it may be said, without reservation, that if ever there was a book that produced a religion, a community, a culture and a civilization, it is the Qur'ān. For this reason, the origins and destiny of the Muslim *Ummah* rest with the Qur'ān.

It would be no exaggeration to suggest that *Tafsīr* literature mirrors Muslim religious and social thought at its best. The real genius of the Muslim mind has expressed itself in its unceasing efforts to understand and interpret the word of God as enshrined in the Qur'ān and as exemplified in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him). And just as the Qur'ān deals with all aspects of human life, thought and behaviour, so *Tafsīr* literature constitutes a spectrum reflecting Muslim ideas in all areas of human thought and behaviour. From eschatology and metaphysics to prayer and worship, from epistemology to individual conduct and social behaviour, from social philosophy to the problems of familial and societal organization, from theology to law and morality, from the most sensitive aspects of motivation to the explicit problems of war and peace, to justice and *Iḥsān*, to history and futurology. A meaningful history of Muslim thought cannot be written without delving deep into *Tafsīr* literature. This is the reason why most of the histories of Muslim thought, written either in the West or which have drawn primarily upon sources other than *Tafsīr* literature, have failed to capture the richness and originality of Muslim contributions to human thought and society.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) was not only the recipient of the Divine Revelation contained in the Qur'ān; he was also its most authentic interpreter and expounder. The *Sunnah* represents the Qur'ān in practice. It embodies and radiates the model in both space and time.

The prophetic model is not only the realization of the ideal; it also inaugurates a process through which those who have followed in the footsteps of the Prophet throughout the ages have continued to strive to understand, interpret, explain and implement the Word of God. Succeeding generations strived to follow the model and learn from the efforts of their predecessors. The text of the Qur'ān was preserved and protected in its totality; it was spared human explanation. The translation of the Qur'ān into other languages was accepted as an aid to the understanding of the Qur'ān, but it was never accepted as a substitute for that text. A translation is a *human effort* and constitutes a form of *tafsīr* (*bayān*). Efforts were made in every age to understand the meaning of the Qur'ān and to discover its teachings' relevance to the problems faced by the people in particular situations. The eternal has continued to provide guidance for the temporal in all times and climes. Similarly, efforts to implement the teachings were made at both individual and collective levels, and which did not lose sight of the specific problems of the age. In facing these challenges, meticulous care was taken to see that the Word of God and the Word of man remained distinct. Every effort to understand the intent of the Master and its relevance to changing situations remained a human effort, despite the fact that, in the context of Islamic thought and literature, these represented the best of the Muslim genius. Over a thousand *tafsīrs* are available in the Arabic language and a similar number in other Muslim languages taken together. Fresh contributions have been made in every age and from all areas of the Muslim world.

The science of *Tafsīr* is a very specialized discipline. I make no effort in this brief foreword to capture even the most distinct aspects of its subject. Although it would be worthwhile to highlight at least three areas of special concern.

First and foremost, I would like to make reference to the Muslim scholars and savants who have strived to find the meaning to verses of the Qur'ān by reference to other verses of the Qur'ān itself and to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). These efforts have been supplemented by attempts to find out how the Companions of the Prophet understood different verses of the Qur'ān. While using the tools of lexicon – the Arab idiom and usage at the time of the Prophet and the literary tradition which constituted

the intellectual universe in which the Qur'ān was revealed – their real effort was to understand the meaning of the Qur'ān in light of the interpretation given by the Prophet, his Companions and the early savants. In the typology of *Tafsīr*, this is known as the tradition of *Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr*.

The second area of concern I have chosen relates to the *fiqhī tafsīr*. The primary concern, in this context, was to find out the commentary (*Aḥkām*) in relation to the different aspects of individual and collective life and behaviour. This covered not only whatever was available in the form of direct and explicit injunctions but also what was derived by applying the principles of *tafsīr* and the inference of law (*istinbāṭ al-Aḥkām*). Efforts were made to apply Qur'ānic injunctions to new problems with the aim of deriving the intent of law for situations not explicitly covered. As Qur'ānic guidance comprehends all aspects of life, this effort became all-embracing. *Fiqhī Tafāsīr* lay its primary emphasis on spelling out Qur'ānic guidance on the multifarious aspects of human life, and applies, in particular, general principles to actual problems and infers the law for issues and areas not directly covered in the text.

The third major area of concern covers the wide spectrum of *tafāsīr* written to highlight the wisdom contained in the Qur'ān, the rationale behind its beliefs as well as its commands, the vision of the man and the society the Qur'ān builds and how it differs from the vision of man and society in other religions, ideologies and philosophies. These *tafāsīr* also deal with objections and criticisms made against some of the teachings of the Qur'ān. Efforts were also made to show the relevance of the Qur'ān to the problems of the age and how these problems could be solved by recourse to the Qur'ān. This category is known as *Kalāmī Tafsīr*.

Although these three perspectives are not exclusive, Qur'ānic studies have nevertheless progressed in every age as a result of them. Muslim scholars, in their attempts to search out Qur'ānic answers to the challenges of their times have always tried to fathom Qur'ānic depths. Every age has its own outstanding contributions which testify to the inner strength and vitality of the Islamic traditions. For example, the latter half of the twentieth century will be remembered for two seminal contributions to *tafsīr* literature; namely *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* by Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī.

The Qur'ān held a unique fascination for Sayyid Mawdūdī. To him it was not simply a sacred book which had to be believed in as an article of faith. It was something more, something vitally different and something very special. Let me spell out his relationship with the Book in his own words.

It was in 1946 that an interesting book appeared under the title *Mashāhīr Ahl-e-'Ilm kī Muḥsin Kitāben* (Books that Moved the Intellectual Luminaries, literally 'their Benefactor Books'). It was an anthology of essays and memoirs written by over two dozen top-ranking scholars and statesmen of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Each one recapitulated and reflected upon the books that had influenced him most. In this myriad galaxy, which highlighted outstanding books from Rūmī's *Mathnawī* to the *Ṭilism-e-Hushrubā* (A Book of Magic and Fairy Tales), the shortest yet the most moving contribution was from Sayyid Mawdūdī. He was alone in identifying only one book, strangely enough the one not mentioned by any of the other distinguished scholars; it was the Qur'ān: 'I have studied a large number of books, particularly in the days of my early gropings in the dark (*Jāhilīyah*). It would not be an exaggeration to submit that I have tried to imbibe quite a library – books dealing with philosophy, old and new, science (natural and social), economics, politics and what not. But when I studied the Qur'ān with the eyes of my soul it opened up a new world before me. The spell of all that I had read in my age of gropings was cast asunder. Then only, I realized that now I have had access to the roots of knowledge, and the world of reality; Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx and other secular thinkers began to look like pygmies. In fact, I began to pity them, for they could not resolve issues, despite grappling with them throughout their life and producing thereon huge volumes. This Book has resolved these in a few words. This Book alone is my true benefactor. It has changed me altogether. It has transformed the animal in me into a human. It has conducted me from darkness into light. It has endowed me with a beacon which illumines every dismal corner of life into which I now venture to move. Now reality glows before my eyes without any mask. The key that can open every locked door is called a "master-key". So to me, the Qur'ān constitutes the master-key which resolves every problem of human life. It has opened up for me glorious avenues of life and progress. Words fail me to thank the Lord, Allah, *subḥānahū wata'ālā*, Who bestowed upon us this Blessed Book.'

The Qur'ān is the key to Sayyid Mawdūdī's life and mission. In his view, where the Muslims have failed is in the weakening or pollution of their relationship with the Qur'ān. It was the Qur'ān that made them masters of the world. It is the Qur'ān which can once again set their house in order and enable them to win back their rightful place in the world.

It is significant that the journal through which Sayyid Mawdūdī launched his intellectual crusade was called *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*

(Spokesman of the Qur'ān). And when the Islamic Movement of the *Jamā'at-i-Islāmī* was formally launched, in August 1941, he devoted most of his energies to writing the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* so that this movement would imbibe the message of the Qur'ān and engage in the struggle to establish the world order that the Qur'ān wants to establish. That is why *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* occupies a very central position in Sayyid Mawdūdī's strategy for Islamic revolution.

Sayyid Mawdūdī is one of the chief architects of contemporary Islamic resurgence. He was a prolific writer. He authored more than 150 books and treatises on different aspects of Islam, ranging from *al-Jihād fī al-Islām* to the Manifesto of the *Jamā'at-i-Islāmī*. His *magnum opus*, however, remains the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, his translation and *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur'ān. This alone epitomizes his elegant literary style, his vast erudition, the clarity and brilliance of his thought and the candour of his commitment to change the world in the image of the Qur'ān. It was in the maturity of his youth, in February 1942, at the age of thirty-nine, that he began the writing of this *tafsīr*; it was not until May 1973, when his hair had run white and he had sought retirement from the active leadership of the *Jamā'at*, that he completed the work. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is the choicest product of a lifetime – a life dedicated to the glory of the Lord, a life engaged in honest intellectual inquiry, in robust scholarship, in all round *Jihād* to establish the supremacy of the truth as revealed by Allah and as practised by His prophet. *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* has been published in six volumes. The first volume appeared in 1950, when Sayyid Mawdūdī was in prison, and the last one appeared in 1973.

The *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is the most widely read *tafsīr* in our times.

Tafhīm is a unique contribution to contemporary *tafsīr* literature. For this reason, some of its distinct contributions deserve to be highlighted.

The uniqueness of *Tafhīm* lies in the fact that it looks upon the Qur'ān as a book of guidance (*hidāyah*). There is no denying that the Qur'ān does deal with aspects of history, geography, socio-economic relations, natural phenomena, etc., but it is not primarily concerned with any of these subject areas. It is a masterpiece of higher literature, but it is not meant to be used as a mere piece of literature. As such, the Qur'ān has been approached as the mainspring for guidance, destined to play a decisive role in the reconstruction of thought and action, of institutions and society; as was the case when it was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). The function of *Tafhīm* is not to dwell primarily or mainly on literary beauties and legalistic niceties – which have not been

ignored – but to develop an understanding of the Qur'ān as the source of guidance.

Sayyid Mawdūdī also emphasizes that the Qur'ān is a book of a movement. It presents a message, invites the whole human race to a view of reality and society, organizes those who respond to this call into an ideological community and enjoins upon this community the necessity to strive for the socio-moral reconstruction of humanity, both individually and collectively. The Qur'ān wants to produce a universal ideological movement and constitutes a guide-book for this movement. Much of the Qur'ān cannot be properly understood unless it is studied in the context of this framework. The Prophet was assigned to play a historical role as the leader of this Islamic movement. The Qur'ān was revealed to him piecemeal during the twenty-three years of his prophetic career, guiding his steps throughout his struggle. This guaranteed guidance has a particular, as well as a general and universal, aspect. In its particular aspect, this entire milieu provides an illustration of the movement and change which the Qur'ān wants to bring about. In its general and universal aspect, the Qur'ān abstracts from the specific time-space context and presents the model which can and should be applied in different time-space situations. Sayyid Mawdūdī approached the Qur'ān as the guide-book for this movement of Islamic reconstruction. As such, the internal evidence of the Qur'ān, revealing as it does different aspects and situations of this *Da'wah* and movement, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and of his Companions and the evidence on *Asbāb al-Tanzīl*, assumes great significance in his understanding of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān presents a complete way of life – a code of conduct and a scheme for organizing the total gamut of human life – belief, action and society. It does not divide itself into water-tight material and spiritual, this-worldly and that-worldly, compartments. It creates only one supreme loyalty – to Allah and His prophet; and tries to organize the whole fabric of human life on this basis. Sayyid Mawdūdī suggests that the key concepts of the Qur'ān are *Ilāh, Rabb, 'Ibādah* and *al-Dīn*. The Qur'ān invites man to accept the Creator as *Rabb*, the Sustainer and Sovereign, to harmonize his will with the Will of Allah in all its aspects (*'ibādah*) and to establish the Will of Allah over the totality of life (*dīn*). This is the path through which man can seek the fulfilment of his real nature. This is the approach that the *Tafhīm* has expounded.

In his unique style, Sayyid Mawdūdī emphasizes that the key to the understanding of the Qur'ān lies in its style and methodology. These are distinct and unique – suited to its purpose and mission –

and consequently do not fit any framework developed by human scholarship. Its purpose is *Hidāyah* (guidance). It addresses itself to man. Its target is to develop a new consciousness of reality and to generate a new social movement to establish a new culture and civilization. To achieve this objective, it has adopted a direct and straightforward method of heart-to-heart conversation between God and man. Its style is that of brief and precise *Khuṭubāt* addressed by God to man but containing all the elements of a meaningful dialogue between the two. Individually, every *āyah* of the Qur'ān serves this purpose, and in the context in which it occurs. Sayyid Mawdūdī develops a new concept of the (*Naẓm*) system and sequence within the Qur'ān. Earlier *Mufassirūn* have tried to elaborate on the relationship between the different *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. Some have studied *Naẓm* within every *sūrah*. Sayyid Mawdūdī attempted to study the *Naẓm* of the whole of the Qur'ān and of each *sūrah*, and the relationship between different *sūrahs* and between verses within the *sūrah* in light of the overall objectives of the Qur'ān, and has shown how they are woven together into one glorious pattern. The apparent diversity is permeated with a purposive unity. To Mawdūdī, the style and methodology of the Qur'ān are not secondary to its purpose, rather they are its essential instruments. Instead of presenting an apology for the methodology of the Qur'ān or trying to justify it logically or rhetorically, he has presented this methodology of the Qur'ān as a unique and essential key to the understanding of the message and mission of the Qur'ān.

These propositions form the framework in which Sayyid Mawdūdī tried to study the Qur'ān. He has written a *Muqaddimah*, prolegomena, to the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, wherein he has discussed his approach to the study of the Qur'ān and the principles of interpretation he has followed, and a treatise on the key concepts of the Qur'ān: *Ilāh, Rabb, 'Ibādah* and *al-Dīn*. Every *sūrah* has been prefaced by an introduction giving the subject matter of the *sūrah*, its relevance to the overall scheme of the Qur'ān, its historical setting and a summary of the questions and issues discussed in it.

The *Tafhīm* offers a new translation of the Qur'ān which is neither literal nor liberal. It is an interpretative translation in direct, forceful and modern Urdu. In the first place, this translation conveys the meaning of the Qur'ān in a forceful style nearest to the spirit of the original. Secondly, it renders the spoken word of the Arabic into the written word of Urdu. With this translation, Sayyid Mawdūdī has tried to provide for the ordinary Urdu reader an almost direct access to the Qur'ān.

Another distinctive aspect of this translation is the use of para-

graphs. In the text of the Qur'ān, there are no paragraphs. The division of the Qur'ān into *Manzil, Juz'* and *Rukū'* is only for the convenience of recitation. They are not meaningful divisions. The introduction of paragraphing in translation is a major innovation and to the best of my knowledge, Sayyid Mawdūdī has been the first scholar to do so in Urdu, and perhaps in any language of the world.

The translation is followed by explanatory notes elaborating the meaning of the Qur'ān, giving historical and other information wherever necessary, pin-pointing the relevance of a verse to the message and spirit of the Qur'ān and the needs of the Islamic movement, explaining the *ḥikmah* (rationale) behind different injunctions and their import for our own times. Through these notes, Sayyid Mawdūdī has tried to develop a new *'ilm al-Kalām* based upon the Qur'ān and utilizing the developments of modern knowledge, the principles of historical criticism, comparative religion and ideologies. In using the methodology of the Qur'ān to develop a new *'ilm al-Kalām* Mawdūdī has added grist to his mill. His effort is to use these notes as an aid to the understanding of the Qur'ān and to dispel doubts and difficulties which a modern-educated Muslim may face in his efforts to study the Qur'ān. He has been only too eager to avoid any issues which may distract the reader's attention from the word of the Qur'ān. The notes are functional and not just ornamental.

He has also used these notes to delineate and elaborate the broad outlines of the total scheme of life adumbrated in the Qur'ān and to suggest how this can be translated into the reality of the present time.

While dealing with the *Aḥkām*, he has avoided sectarian controversies. Although he generally follows the Ḥanafī school, he has usually in his explanatory notes stated the viewpoint of all major schools of Islamic thought, including that of the *Shī'ah*. This helps the reader appreciate how a certain verse has been explained or approached by scholars belonging to different schools. It also identifies the flexibility of Islamic law, and paves the way for bridging the gap between the different schools of thought. In so doing, it lays the foundations for an ecumenical movement within Islam.

In his exegesis, Sayyid Mawdūdī tries not only to capture the original meaning and impact of the Qur'ān but also to throw light on the model that emerges from that, as a guide for the present and for the future.

Another distinct feature of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is its index. Running into some three hundred pages it is, perhaps, the most

elaborate and exhaustive concordance of the Qur'ān. It deals with the concepts, themes, personalities and events in the Qur'ān and is an extremely useful aid to any researcher.

Tafhīm al-Qur'ān is a major contribution to *Tafsīr* literature. It is difficult to measure it with the yardsticks of modernism or traditionalism. It may, more correctly, be described as revivalist and revolutionary. Its emphasis is on movement, activism and dynamism, without taking liberties with the Word of God or equating the concepts of the Qur'ān with the thought-content of modern ideologies. It is permeated with respect for tradition in thought and practice without completely identifying the Qur'ān with the institutional structures produced by the Muslims during the course of history. It is a plea for purposive change and tries to develop the faculty to discriminate between the essential and the incidental, between the divine, and as such permanent, and the human, and as such changeable. The *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* is, itself, a human effort and is subject to all the possibilities and limitations of the human effort to understand and explain the Divine Word. It has its own contemporary flavour and this constitutes its merit as well as its limitation.

The need to produce a complete translation of the *Tafhīm* in the English language has been felt ever since its publication in Urdu. To fulfil this need, Islamic Publications, Lahore has published an English translation of the *Tafhīm*. Although this rendered a useful service, it was commonly realized that the translation could not capture the real force and elegance of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, which is not only a masterpiece of scholarship, but also a rare piece of literary excellence. The text of the Qur'ān, as translated in Urdu by Sayyid Mawdūdī, could not be effectively reproduced in the English translation. Explanatory notes were abridged in a number of places. Editorial language standards and the physical production of the book left much to be desired. Sayyid Mawdūdī realized these limitations and wanted a new and more forceful translation of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* in modern English and was eager that the same be printed to professional and international standards. It was with this ambition that the late Chaudhri Ghulam Muhammad and the present writer discussed with Sayyid Mawdūdī the plan for a new translation of the *Tafhīm*. We all agreed that Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari would be the most competent person to undertake this onerous task. His command of Arabic, Urdu and English and his deep understanding and insight into the thought and style of Sayyid Mawdūdī qualified him for the job. It was in deference to the wish of Sayyid Mawdūdī that Chaudhri Ghulam Muhammad and I persuaded Dr.

Zafar Ishaq Ansari to commit himself to this assignment, a responsibility that he shouldered with some reluctance. It is unfortunate that both Sayyid Mawdūdī and Chaudhri Ghulam Muhammad are no longer with us to see the fruit of Dr. Ansari's heroic effort to recreate the *Tafhīm* in English. Their souls would, however, be happy to see that their dream is now coming true.

The Islamic Foundation is publishing this new translation in fulfilment of the command of Sayyid Mawdūdī, with the co-operation of his family, and with the permission of the Idāra Tarjumānul Qur'ān which holds the copyright of the original. The Foundation has established a permanent cell to prepare and oversee the production of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* in the English language. We have tried to achieve the highest standards of accuracy, literary elegance and aesthetic production. The first volume contains the *Muqaddimah* and *tafsīr* of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*, *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān*. The second volume, to appear shortly, will go upto *Sūrah al-A'rāf*. The translation of the entire Urdu *Tafhīm* is expected to be completed in twelve to fifteen volumes of almost equal size. It is hoped that at least one volume will appear every year. May Allah enable us to achieve this target and may Allah make this translation as instrumental in spreading the message and mission of the Qur'ān all over the world as He has blessed the Urdu *Tafhīm* to rekindle the spark of faith in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and committed them to the Islamic mission. And may Allah give the best rewards to all those who have been engaged or who have been helpful in producing this English version of the *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*.

Leicester **Khurshid Ahmad**
9 Jumāda al-Thānī, 1408
23 January, 1988

Editor's Preface

The present work is a fresh English rendering of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* – a translation of, and commentary on, the Qur'ān by this century's most extensively read and influential Muslim scholar, Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī (1903–1979). Though he was born, and lived throughout his life, in the South Asian subcontinent, Mawdūdī's writings attracted Muslims across the globe and contributed greatly to that complex of feeling, consciousness, and activity which has lately come to be characterized, mainly by the outside world, as 'Islamic resurgence'.

Mawdūdī was uniquely gifted for the task he undertook – a systematic exposition of the teachings of Islam. To help him fulfil that task he possessed a clear and penetrating mind as well as a felicitous and vigorous pen. Not only that, he had also been engaged since his early years in an extensive and unusually intelligent study of Islam. Also, thanks to his knowledge of English and his broad intellectual curiosity, he had easy access to the fount of Western learning. Moreover, far from being an intellectual recluse, Mawdūdī had a keen awareness of the problems of the time in which he lived, a fair grasp of the 'spirit of the age'. When all these qualities are taken into account, alongside Mawdūdī's redoubtable ability to organize and present his material systematically and vigorously and marshal his arguments in a highly ordered and logical fashion, it is not difficult to appreciate why his writings should have had such a great impact on his readers.

As a writer, Mawdūdī was both prolific and versatile. His works, which number around 150, and range from small tracts to voluminous books, encompass virtually every aspect of Islam. These works were generally well received, especially his exposition of the socio-economic and political doctrines of Islam that won for him considerable acclaim. Likewise, he distinguished himself by arguing and forcefully establishing that the principles prescribed by Islam were intrinsically sound, that they were relevant for, and viable in,

every age and clime, that they were conducive to the overall well-being of man. In addition, Mawdūdī also contributed to the traditionally recognized fields of Islamic scholarship such as *Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh* and *'Ilm al-Kalām*. However, the Qur'ān held for him a very special, and one might say, incomparable fascination. He relished the Book of God beyond measure and never ceased to look up to it at every turn of his life for light, guidance and inspiration. In his view, the Qur'ān was not to be approached merely for *barakah* (blessing); it should serve as the sheet-anchor of every Muslim's life. It should be his main source of inspiration, the driving and guiding force of all his activities. The Muslim should let the Qur'ān shape his intellectual outlook, mould his character and conduct, and provide the yardstick with which to judge all things. Mawdūdī once described the Qur'ān as the 'master-key' which had solved for him all his intellectual problems, had removed all his perplexities. It is perhaps significant that the monthly magazine which he chose to edit and through which he articulated his ideas for forty-six years (1933–79) bore the apellation *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (The Interpreter of the Qur'ān).

It was in the early forties, however, that Mawdūdī decided to launch upon a full-scale work on the Qur'ān consisting of an interpretative translation of the Qur'ānic text accompanied by explanatory notes. Instalments of the work, which Mawdūdī chose to call *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, appeared every month in the aforementioned magazine. It took more than thirty years for the work to be completed, a huge work of six volumes, each of approximately 700 large-size pages.

When Mawdūdī embarked on the work, he had a relatively modest aim in mind. He primarily felt uneasy with the lifeless translations of the Qur'ān in Urdu and felt the need to produce an elegant, readable, and free-flowing translation that would reflect in Urdu prose something of the literary force and fluency of the Qur'ān. As for the explanatory notes, it was conceived that they would be confined to explaining only the basic teachings of the Qur'ān without attempting to deal with the more detailed and technical matters which are generally covered in the standard works of *Tafsīr*. The underlying reason for this was that in Mawdūdī's conception *Tafhīm* was addressed to the layman rather than to the scholar.

But as Mawdūdī went along, his vision of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* underwent a major change. After a few years, the purely scholarly aspects of Qur'ānic exegesis increasingly engaged his attention and his notes became more and more copious. From this point onwards

Tafhīm began to attract people not merely because of the author's ability to apply the relevance of Islamic teachings to the problems of the present age, or because of a relatively greater emphasis on the socio-economic and political aspects of Islam in his writings. It began to be valued also for the research and scholarship of the author, of which the work was a good testimony.

Even before the first volume of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (covering the first six *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an) was published in 1950, the work had already attracted the interest and won the admiration of a wide circle of readers, both laymen and scholars. The work was particularly useful for those who, because of the generally difficult and somewhat archaic language and style of the translations and *Tafsīr* works available to Urdu readers, were often discouraged from embarking on a serious study of the Qur'ān. *Tafhīm*, on the other hand, was characterized by a simple and forceful style apart from having a certain freshness of approach. It indeed attempted to achieve what its title – *Tafhīm* – signified, viz. to help the reader understand the meaning and message of the Qur'ān. What is more, in attempting to do so, the author had especially kept in view those aspects of the Qur'ān which the contemporary reader needs most to understand, and relates them to the problems which often agitate his mind. It was in the same context that Mawdūdī also tried to highlight in *Tafhīm* that the teachings of the Qur'ān were equally relevant for the men and women of today as they had been for those of bygone ages. All these features have helped many a reader to appreciate, and experience, that the Qur'ān was addressed directly to him, that it had something important to say to him as a person. Thus *Tafhīm* has led countless people to approach the Qur'ān directly and seek the riches of meaning and inspiration from its vast, boundless treasure-house. Turning people directly to the Qur'ān for light and guidance is perhaps the most significant contribution of the work.

I felt greatly honoured when I was asked to render this important work into English. It was, however, with considerable diffidence that I accepted the undertaking. For the book that I had to deal with contained the Word of God, the 'weighty word', the Book which, had God sent it down 'on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder for fear of Allah' (59: 21). I was, then, as I am now, acutely conscious that my endowments – scholastic, intellectual and literary – are quite limited. I have thus often felt that with those limitations, it was indeed an act of boldness to accept such a stupendous responsibility. I was encouraged, however, by the fact that Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī himself

considered me worthy of the task and sent word to that effect. Obviously I had no choice.

For a host of reasons my task was far from an easy one. Translation from one language into another is always difficult, and especially so when the material to be translated consists of matters that require both accuracy and subtlety of expression. In this particular case, the task was rendered even more difficult by the fact that the two languages in question belong to two different cultural and intellectual traditions. These factors were in addition to the erstwhile dilemma of every translator: to what extent he should remain close to the original text and to what extent he should exercise some liberty in departing from it – even with circumspection – in the interest of making the translated text read better and possess the characteristic flavour of the translated language.

I naturally attempted to combine, as perhaps most translators would do, the two opposing considerations. In order to achieve this, I tried to keep my first draft as close to the text as possible, trying to retain as much as I could of the original, even the sequence of words and phrases. This draft served as the base, and it was subjected to a series of drastic revisions in order to make it readable in terms of the accepted idiom and style of English. Even so, I made an effort to retain something of the flavour of the Urdu literary prose, and especially of the characteristic style of Mawdūdī.

In order to enhance the usefulness of the work, especially for those readers of English whose needs are different from those of a lay reader in Urdu for whom this book was originally intended, I have added a number of features.

For instance, in the original work a number of statements seemed to require documentation, yet, for good, understandable reasons they had not been documented by the author. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this work to provide adequate documentation wherever this documentation seemed necessary. Also, wherever there are quotations in *Tafhīm* from English sources – and they are, of course, Urdu translations of the original – I have gone back to the original sources, located the passages in the quoted works and incorporated them in the present work.

Documentation of *Ḥadīth* proved to be particularly difficult and consumed an enormous amount of time. For referencing, I have adopted the system followed by A. J. Wensinck in his *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, Leiden, 1927, and later in his famous *Concordance*. The references to various *Tafsīr* works in the notes signify the numbers of the *Sūrahs* and verses in question rather

than the volumes and pages of the *Tafsīr* works concerned. This has been uniformly followed except in one or two cases where the note referred to was too lengthy and hence it was found necessary to also indicate the volume and page. All quotations from the Bible have been taken from the Revised Standard Edition (for details of which, see the Bibliography).

In order to help the lay English reader – who needs more information on certain basic features of Islam and its history than an average Urdu reader – a few more additions were considered necessary. A Glossary of Terms has been included to explain some of the major terms that have been used. Likewise, Biographical Notes have been added to give at least some basic information regarding the persons whose names occur in the text. Also, in addition to the Subject Index (which is a translation of the Index prepared by the author of *Tafhīm*), a General Index has been added. A Bibliography of the books referred to in the work has also been provided. Finally, a few – very few – notes have been added at places where elucidation seemed necessary.

Additions made by the editor have been kept to a minimum and wherever they appear it has been indicated that they are from the editor.

It took me quite a long time to prepare the manuscript of the present work, and then a number of reasons caused considerable delay in bringing it to the light of day. During the course of these years, I have received assistance and encouragement from a large number of people. To all of them I owe a debt of gratitude and here at least a few, if not all, must be mentioned.

The greatest encouragement, of course, came from the late Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī who honoured me immensely by reposing his trust in me as one suited for the task of rendering *Tafhīm* into English. It is a matter of great sorrow for me that when the first volume of this work is appearing in print, he is no longer in our midst. May Allah reward him with eternal peace.

Likewise, I received much encouragement from the late Chaudhri Ghulam Muhammad and my life-long friend, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, both of whom urged me to apply myself to a task whose stupendousness made me shrink.

The first draft was seen by several friends, of whom I must especially mention my close friend Dr. Ali Kettani, presently Director General, Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development, Jeddah, who read a part of it and favoured me with his comments. There are three persons, however, from whose

editorial suggestions I benefited the most: Mr. Muhtar Holland, Mr. P. Moorman and Miss S. Thackray. Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim H. I. Surty of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester not only provided editorial assistance but also saw the work through the final processes of publication with meticulous care. I would also like to thank Dr. M. M. Ahsan, Director General of the Islamic Foundation and Mr. E. R. Fox for their valuable assistance. Dr. Muhammad Sa'id and his colleagues at the University of Peshawar and Mr. Anwarul Haq of ACE Lahore rendered valuable cartographic assistance in preparing the maps, in the light of the original sketches drawn by the author. Let me also record my gratitude to my friend Mr. Faiyazuddin Ahmad whose hospitality during my stay in Leicester has left indelible memories. Mrs. Barratt, the tireless secretary of the Islamic Foundation, has put me under considerable obligation by typing the manuscript over and over again.

In the preparation of the Subject Index the main work was done by my friend, Syed Zaheer Iqbal, and in the preparation of the General Index, I received much assistance from my niece, Aishah and her husband, Mawlana Yusuf Talal Ali. Mr. Ahmad Ashfaq, a long-time friend and colleague at the University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran provided much assistance in referencing a large number of traditions. Professor Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, an eminent scholar and Director, Shah Faisal Masjid Islamic Centre, Islamabad helped me by tracing some intractable material needed in connection with the Biographical Notes.

During my long stay in Saudi Arabia (1967–1986) and my association with the University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran (1970–1986), I was encouraged by the interest shown in my work by several people. Of these special mention must be made of Dr. Bakr Abdullah Bakr and Dr. Fahd Hamid Dakhil, respectively Rector and Vice-Rector of King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran and several friends, especially Dr. Ahmad Totonji, Mr. Daud Mathews and Dr. Muhammad al-Jar-Allah.

My father once kindly looked at the manuscript and the few critical comments and suggestions that he made only showed how much his son could learn from him.

Mr. Khurram Jah Murad's devotion to Islam and especially his ardent love for the Qur'ān have been a continuing source of inspiration during our very close, life-long friendship – an inspiration which words definitely fail to describe. I have no doubt that had he condescended to review the manuscript of this work critically, the touch of his pen would have turned it – as everything else that it touches – into pure, solid gold.

During the course of this work, my wife and children kept my moral high by cheerfully bearing my involvement in a work which occasionally prevented me from giving them their due time and attention, and by their occasional expression of pride in a task that hopefully constitutes some service – however modest – to promote a better and fuller understanding of the Book of Allah.

To these, and to many others who assisted and encouraged me in this task – and these are too numerous to mention individually – I record my profound sense of gratitude. May Allah bless them all.

Islamabad, **Zafar Ishaq Ansari**
19 Dhu al-Qa'dah, 1407 A.H.
17 July, 1987

Author's Preface

When so many translations of, and commentaries on, the Holy Qur'ān already exist, a desire for spiritual blessing and grace is not in itself sufficient justification for undertaking a fresh venture in this field. The effort will only be worthwhile if it fills gaps left by earlier works, or satisfies some unmet need felt by those interested in studying the Holy Book.

The present work is neither directed at scholars and researchers, nor is it aimed at assisting those who, having mastered the Arabic language and the Islamic religious sciences, now wish to embark upon a thorough and elaborate study of the Qur'ān. Such people already have plenty of material at their disposal. Instead it is intended for the lay reader, the average educated person, who is not well-versed in Arabic and so is unable to make full use of the vast treasures to be found in classical works on the Qur'ān. For this reason many subjects prominent in the more technical works of Qur'ānic exegesis have not been treated. The principal aims throughout have been to help the reader to acquire a clear grasp of the Qur'ān, to clarify ambiguities which he may encounter in his study, and to solve problems which may arise in his mind. It is for the reader to judge how far these aims have been achieved.

Literal translation has been abandoned in favour of a relatively free interpretative rendering of the Qur'ān. This does not imply any objection to literal translation as such. Several distinguished scholars have already used this approach admirably. For example, the translation of Shāh Walī Allāh in Persian and the translations of Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir, Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, Mawlānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan, Mawlāna Ashraf 'Alī and Ḥāfiz Fatḥ Muḥammad Jālandharī in Urdu. For this reason little useful remains to be done in this sphere. There are, however, certain needs which are not, and cannot, be met by a literal translation and it is to these that this work seeks to respond.

Literal translations of the Qur'ān tend inevitably to lack literary

force, fluency, eloquence and stylistic charm. Such lifelessness is incapable of either arousing the reader to ecstasy, stirring his being, making his eyes flow with tears, or raising a storm of emotion within his soul. Literal translations often leave one doubting whether the original book could indeed have been that which challenged the whole world to produce another like it. What filters through is merely the dry husk of its contents, stripped of all literary enchantment. The violent, soul-shaking spirit which permeates the original text is thus evaporated into thin air. This is a serious drawback, for the literary force of the Qur'ān plays possibly as important a role in conveying its message as the teachings themselves. It was the literary quality of the Qur'ān – a quality acknowledged even by its opponents – which first melted the hearts of its opponents, and shook the length and breadth of Arabia like a thunderbolt.

Another reason why literal translations fail to inspire the reader is the manner is which they are set for printing. Either the interlinear style is followed or, according to a more recent fashion, a page is bisected and the Qurānic text is printed on one half of the page, with the translation on the other half. This practice certainly has its uses, but its drawback is that the reader, being unable to read passages with continuity, often fails to receive their full impact as chunks of Arabic constantly interrupt the flow of his reading.

Most English translations of the Qur'ān make particularly lifeless reading because, following the Biblical pattern, the translation of each verse is numbered, and begins on a new line. Take any piece of great literature, break it into fragments, put one sentence over another, give each one a number, and then try to read it. It will soon become obvious that the impact is nothing like that created by reading a coherent and continuous text.

A further important reason why literal translations of the Qur'ān tend to be ineffective is that the Qur'ānic style is oratorical rather than narrative. If the translator retains the original oratorical style, rather than replacing it with straightforward prose, passages are bound to appear somewhat incoherent. It is well known that the Qur'ān was not originally revealed as a set of written treatises. What actually happened was that various discourses were revealed to the Prophet (peace be on him) in the context of the circumstances and problems which he encountered in the course of his mission, and these he delivered to the people in spoken form.

Oral language and style naturally differ greatly from written composition. For example, suppose a person were to write something to clarify a misunderstanding. He would first have to refer explicitly to the misunderstanding, then say things which might clarify it. But

a man delivering a speech for the purpose of clarifying that same misunderstanding would not need to make specific reference to it, for his audience would consist largely of the very people concerned.

Again, an orator may often switch from one grammatical person to another, while referring both to himself and to his audience. He will sometimes mention his audience in the third person, while at other times address them directly in the second. He may similarly alternate between the singular and the plural. He will sometimes speak on his own behalf, and sometimes on behalf of a group of people. At other times he will speak as if representing some power on high, and on yet other occasions that power will speak through his tongue. This undoubtedly makes speech more effective, but when that speech appears in book form, an element of incoherence is bound to be noticeable; the farther one is removed from the original context and environment the greater the sense of incoherence.

This explains why people who do not fully appreciate this fact and, despite their knowledge of Arabic, complain of a lack of coherence between various parts of the Qur'ān. Since the Qur'ān is literally the Word of God, it would obviously be sacrilegious to add a single syllable to the original text, even with the intention of enabling the reader to have a better perception of its inner coherence. Hence the only service that Qur'ānic scholars can render to Arabic-knowing readers is to provide explanatory notes wherever needed. However, when we attempt to convey the meaning of the Qur'ān in another language, it seems justifiable to take a little liberty – though exercising the utmost care and circumspection – and replace the oral by the written style, thereby easing the problem of those who have difficulty in perceiving its inner coherence.

As already pointed out, every *sūrah* of the Qur'ān is in fact a segment of speech, revealed at a certain stage of the Islamic movement. Each revelation was occasioned by the demands of certain circumstances, and had certain purposes to fulfil. Every *surāh* is so vitally linked with its situational background and its circumstantial setting that anyone reading a mere verbal translation, divorced from its context, would fail to appreciate many of the points being made. It therefore also seems reasonable to occasionally add a few words in such a way that the translated text reflects the situational context, even if only to a very limited extent, and thus renders the passages more comprehensive and more meaningful to the reader.

A final problem with literal translations is that even though the Qur'ān was revealed in 'clear Arabic' (Qur'ān 6: 2), it also has its own special terminology. It often uses words with meanings other than their literal ones and this in itself may give rise to many

ambiguities. Take, for instance, the word '*kufr*', which in the Qur'ānic usage has a different meaning not only from its ordinary Arabic linguistic usage, but also from its terminological connotation in the works of later theologians and jurists. In addition the word is not used uniformly in the same sense throughout the Qur'ān. Sometimes it denotes a state of absolute lack of faith and sometimes it signifies merely rejection or denial. At other times, it is used for an attitude of ingratitude and thanklessness. It is also used to denote non-fulfilment of certain requirements of faith. Yet again, it is used in the sense that, despite the profession of faith, a person's life at a practical level essentially exhibits rejection and disobedience. The same word is further used to signify external obedience unaccompanied by true, inner, conviction. If we were invariably to use the word '*kufr*' in a language such as Urdu, in which it is currently in use, or its equivalent in other languages, the translation would doubtless be correct, but it might fail to convey the full import of the original; it might even give a wrong impression, or create unnecessary confusion in the mind of the reader.

Consideration of these shortcomings has led me to attempt what I would prefer to call an explanatory or interpretative exposition, rather than a literal translation. In other words, I have not tried to render the Arabic text of the Qur'ān into another language. Instead I have tried to express in my own words, and as faithfully as possible, the meaning conveyed to me by the Qur'ānic passages and the impression they make upon me. As far as the form of the work is concerned, I have tried to ensure that this translation does not make dull reading or lack literary elegance and that it reflects something of the force and candour of the 'clear Arabic' of the Qur'ān. I have also tried to help the reader to appreciate the natural continuity of the various parts of the Qur'ānic *sūrahs*, so that as well as embodying the meaning and purport of the Word of God, this work also mirrors something of its majestic grandeur and literary brilliance.

I have prefaced every *sūrah* with careful notes on the period of a particular revelation, the circumstances obtaining at the time, the stage through which the Islamic movement was then passing, and its chief needs and problems. Moreover, wherever specific background information is relevant to the understanding of a particular verse or group of verses, such information is supplied in the explanatory notes. In the explanatory notes, every effort has been made to avoid distracting the reader's attention from the Qur'ān itself. These notes have a two-fold purpose: first, to elucidate and clarify and, second, to highlight the spirit and aim of the Qur'ānic passages. The reader is advised to go through the introductory

sections of each *sūrah* before beginning to study the *sūrah* itself, and to refer back to them even during his study.

Muslim readers are further advised to go through whatever portion of the Qur'ān they usually recite each day, along with any literal translation of its meaning, then to read our interpretative rendering of the same passage without reference to the notes, focusing on the passage as a whole. Only then should they proceed to study it verse by verse, reading the explanatory notes as well for a more thorough understanding. It is hoped that such study will enable the ordinary reader – God willing – to acquire a considerable, if not scholarly, understanding of the Qur'ān.

This work was begun in Muḥarram, 1361 A.H./February, 1942. The work continued for just over five years, during which time interpretative rendering and explanatory notes were completed up to *Sūrah* 12. Then several events, occurring in quick succession, not only prevented me from proceeding with the work, but even from revising what had been thus far accomplished. In October, 1948, by a stroke of luck, good or bad, I was arrested under the Public Safety Act and imprisoned. I was thus able to find the time needed to prepare this work for the press. I now pray to Allah that He may fulfil the purpose for which this work was undertaken, and make it useful for developing a better and fuller understanding of the Holy Qur'ān.

New Central Jail, Multan,
17 Dhu al-Qa'dah, 1368 A.H.
11 September, 1949

Abul A'lā [Mawdūdī]

Introduction

It must be said at once that this is an introduction to this present work, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, and not to the Qur'ān itself. It has been written with two objectives. First, to acquaint the reader with certain matters which he should grasp at the very outset so as to achieve a more than superficial understanding of the Holy Book. Second, to clarify those disturbing questions that commonly arise in the mind of the reader during the study of the Qur'ān.

I

We are accustomed to reading books which present information, ideas and arguments systematically and coherently. So when we embark on the study of the Qur'ān, we expect that this book too will revolve around a definite subject, that the subject matter of the book will be clearly defined at the beginning and will then be neatly divided into sections and chapters, after which discussion will proceed in a logical sequence. We likewise expect a separate and systematic arrangement of instruction and guidance for each of the various aspects of human life.

However, as soon as we open the Qur'ān we encounter a hitherto completely unfamiliar genre of literature. We notice that it embodies precepts of belief and conduct, moral directives, legal prescriptions, exhortation and admonition, censure and condemnation of evil-doers, warnings to deniers of the Truth, good tidings and words of consolation and good cheer to those who have suffered for the sake of God, arguments and corroborative evidence in support of its basic message, allusions to anecdotes from the past and to signs of God visible in the universe. Moreover, these myriad subjects alternate without any apparent system; quite unlike the books to which we

are accustomed, the Qur'ān deals with the same subject over and over again, each time couched in a different phraseology.

The reader also encounters abrupt transitions between one subject matter and another. Audience and speaker constantly change as the message is directed now to one and now to another group of people. There is no trace of the familiar division into chapters and sections. Likewise, the treatment of different subjects is unique. If an historical subject is raised, the narrative does not follow the pattern familiar in historical accounts. In discussions of philosophical or metaphysical questions, we miss the familiar expressions and terminology of formal logic and philosophy. Cultural and political matters, or questions pertaining to man's social and economic life, are discussed in a way very different from that usual in works of social sciences. Juristic principles and legal injunctions are elucidated, but quite differently from the manner of conventional works. When we come across an ethical instruction, we find its form differs entirely from anything to be found elsewhere in the literature of ethics.

The reader may find all this so foreign to his notion of what a book should be that he may become so confused as to feel that the Qur'ān is a piece of disorganized, incoherent and unsystematic writing, comprising nothing but a disjointed conglomeration of comments of varying lengths put together arbitrarily. Hostile critics use this as a basis for their criticism, while those more favourably inclined resort to far-fetched explanations, or else conclude that the Qur'ān consists of unrelated pieces, thus making it amenable to all kinds of interpretation, even interpretations quite opposed to the intent of God Who revealed the Book.

II

What kind of book, then, is the Qur'ān? In what manner was it revealed? What underlies its arrangement? What is its subject? What is its true purpose? What is the central theme to which its multifarious topics are intrinsically related? What kind of reasoning and style does it adopt in elucidating its central theme? If we could obtain clear, lucid answers to these and other related questions we might avoid some dangerous pitfalls, thus making it easier to reflect upon and to grasp the meaning and purpose of the Qur'ānic verses. If we begin studying the Qur'ān in the expectation of reading a book on

religion we shall find it hard, since our notions of religion and of a book are naturaly circumscribed by our range of experience. We need, therefore, to be told in advance that this Book is unique in the manner of its composition, in its theme and in its contents and arrangement. We should be forewarned that the concept of a book which we have formed from our previous readings is likely to be a hindrance, rather than a help, towards a deep understanding of the Qur'ān. We should realize that as a first step towards understanding it we must disabuse our minds of all preconceived notions.

III

The student of the Qur'ān should grasp, from the outset, the fundamental claims that the Qur'ān makes for itself. Whether one ultimately decides to believe in the Qur'ān or not, one must recognize the fundamental statements made by the Qur'ān and by the man to whom it was revealed, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), to be the starting point of one's study. These claims are:

1. The Lord of creation, the Creator and Sovereign of the entire universe, created man on earth (which is merely a part of His boundless realm). He also endowed man with the capacity for cognition, reflection and understanding, with the ability to distinguish between good and evil, with the freedom of choice and volition, and with the power to exercise his latent potentialities. In short, God bestowed upon man a kind of autonomy and appointed him His vicegerent on earth.

2. Although man enjoys this status, God made it abundantly plain to him that He alone is man's Lord and Sovereign, even as He is the Lord and Sovereign of the whole universe. Man was told that he was not entitled to consider himself independent and that only God was entitled to claim absolute obedience, service and worship. It was also made clear to man that life in this world, for which he had been placed and invested with a certain honour and authority, was in fact a temporary term, and was meant to test him; that after the end of this earthly life man must return to God, Who will judge him on the basis of his performance, declaring who has succeeded and who has failed.

The right way for man is to regard God as his only Sovereign and

the only object of his worship and adoration, to follow the guidance revealed by God, to act in this world in the consciousness that earthly life is merely a period of trial, and to keep his eyes fixed on the ultimate objective – success in God's final judgement. Every other way is wrong.

It was also explained to man that if he chose to adopt the right way of life – and in this choice he was free – he would enjoy peace and contentment in this world and be assigned, on his return to God, the abode of eternal bliss and happiness known as Paradise. Should man follow any other way – alhough he was free to do so – he would experience the evil effects of corruption and disorder in the life of this world and be consigned to eternal grief and torment when he crossed the borders of the present world and arrived in the Hereafter.

3. Having explained all this, the Lord of the Universe placed man on earth and communicated to Adam and Eve, the first human beings to live on earth, the guidance which they and their offspring were required to follow. These first human beings were not born in a state of ignorance and darkness. On the contrary, they began their life in the broad daylight of Divine Guidance. They had intimate knowledge of reality and the Law which they were to follow was communicated to them. Their way of life consisted of obedience to God (i.e. Islam) and they taught their children to live in obedience to Him (i.e. to live as Muslims).

In the course of time, however, men gradually deviated from this true way of life and began to follow various erroneous ways. They allowed true guidance to be lost through heedlessness and negligence and sometimes, even deliberately, distorted it out of evil perversity. They associated with God a number of beings, human and non-human, real as well as imaginary, and adored them as deities. They adulterated the God-given knowledge of reality (*al-'ilm* in Qur'ānic terminology) with all kinds of fanciful ideas, superstitions and philosophical concepts, thereby giving birth to innumerable religions. They disregarded or distorted the sound and equitable principles of individual morality and of collective conduct (*Sharī'ah* in Qur'ānic terminology) and made their own laws in accordance with their base desires and prejudices. As a result, the world became filled with wrong and injustice.

4. It was inconsistent with the limited autonomy conferred upon man by God that He should exercise His overwhelming power and compel man to righteousness. It was also inconsistent with the fact that God had granted a term to the human species in which to show

their worth that He should afflict men with catastrophic destruction as soon as they showed signs of rebellion. Moreover, God had undertaken from the beginning of creation that true guidance would be made available to man throughout the term granted to him and that this guidance would be available in a manner consistent with man's autonomy. To fulfil this self-assumed reponsibility God chose to appoint those human beings whose faith in Him was outstanding and who followed the way pleasing to Him. God chose these people to be His envoys. He had His messages communicated to them, honoured them with an intimate knowledge of reality, provided them with the true laws of life and entrusted them with the task of recalling man to the original path from which he had strayed.*

5. These Prophets were sent to different people in different lands and over a period of time covering thousands and thousands of years. They all had the same religion; the one originally revealed to man as the right way for him. All of them followed the same guidance; those principles of morality and collective life prescribed for man at the very outset of his existence. All these Prophets had the same mission – to call man to this true religion and subsequently to organize all who accepted this message into a community (*ummah*) which would be bound by the Law of God, which would strive to establish its observance and would seek to prevent its violation. All the Prophets discharged their missions creditably in their own time. However, there were always many who refused to accept their guidance and consequently those who did accept it and became a 'Muslim' community† gradually degenerated, causing the Divine Guidance either to be lost, distorted or adulterated.

6. At last the Lord of the Universe sent Muḥammad (peace be on him) to Arabia and entrusted him with the same mission that He had entrusted to the earlier Prophets. This last Messenger of God addressed the followers of the earlier Prophets (who had by this time deviated from their original teachings) as well as the rest of humanity. The mission of each Prophet was to call men to the right way of life, to communicate God's true guidance afresh and to organize into one community all who responded to his mission and accepted the guidance vouchsafed to him. Such a community

* These men were Prophets and Messengers of God – Ed.

† That is, a group of people committed to obey the true guidance of God as revealed to His Prophets. Here the word 'Muslim' is not used in the sense of followers of the last Messenger of God, Muḥammad (peace be on him), but in the wider sense, meaning all those who, at various periods, both before and after the advent of the Last Prophet, committed themselves to live in submission to God – Ed.

was to be dedicated to the two-fold task of moulding its own life in accordance with God's guidance and striving for the reform of the world. The Qur'ān is the Book which embodies this mission and guidance, as revealed by God to Muḥammad (peace be on him).

IV

If we remember these basic facts about the Qur'ān it becomes easy to grasp its true subject, its central theme and the objective it seeks to achieve. Insofar as it seeks to explain the ultimate causes of man's success or failure the subject of the Book is MAN.

Its central theme is that concepts relating to God, the universe and man which have emanated from man's own limited knowledge run counter to reality. The same applies to concepts which have been either woven by man's intellectual fancies or which have evolved through man's obsession with animal desires. The ways of life which rest on these false foundations are both contrary to reality and ruinous for man. The essence of true knowledge is that which God revealed to man when He appointed him his vicegerent. Hence, the way of life which is in accordance with reality and conducive to human good is that which we have characterized above as 'the right way'. The real object of the Book is to call people to this 'right way' and to illuminate God's true guidance, which has often been lost either through man's negligence and heedlessness or distorted by his wicked perversity.

If we study the Qur'ān with these facts in mind it is bound to strike us that the Qur'ān does not deviate one iota from its main subject, its central theme and its basic objective. All the various themes occurring in the Qur'ān are related to the central theme; just as beads of different sizes and colour may be strung together to form a necklace. The Qur'ān speaks of the structure of the heavens and the earth and of man, refers to the signs of reality in the various phenomena of the universe, relates anecdotes of bygone nations, criticizes the beliefs, morals and deeds of different peoples, elucidates supernatural truths and discusses many other things besides. All this the Qur'ān does, not in order to provide instruction in physics, history, philosophy or any other particular branch of knowledge, but rather to remove the misconceptions people have about reality and to make that reality manifest to them.

It emphasizes that the various ways men follow, which are not in conformity with reality, are essentially false, and full of harmful consequences for mankind. It calls on men to shun all such ways and to follow instead the way which both conforms to reality and yields best practical results. This is why the Qur'ān mentions everything only to the extent and in the manner necessary for the purposes it seeks to serve. The Qur'ān confines itself to essentials thereby omitting any irrelevant details. Thus, all its contents consistently revolve around this call.

Likewise, it is not possible fully to appreciate either the style of the Qur'ān, the order underlying the arrangement of its verses or the diversity of the subjects treated in it, without fully understanding the manner in which it was revealed.

The Qur'ān, as we have noted earlier, is not a book in the conventional sense of the term. God did not compose and entrust it in one piece to Muḥammad (peace be on him) so that he could spread its message and call people to adopt an attitude to life consonant with its teachings. Nor is the Qur'ān one of those books which discusses their subjects and main themes in the conventional manner. Its arrangement differs from that of ordinary books, and its style is correspondingly different. The nature of this Book is that God chose a man in Makka to serve as His Messenger and asked him to preach His message, starting in his own city (Makka) and with his own tribe (Quraysh). At this initial stage, instructions were confined to what was necessary at this particular juncture of the mission. Three themes in particular stand out:

1. Directives were given to the Prophet (peace be on him) on how he should prepare himself for his great mission and how he should begin working for the fulfilment of his task.

2. A fundamental knowledge of reality was furnished and misconceptions commonly held by people in that regard – misconceptions which gave rise to wrong orientation in life – were removed.

3. People were exhorted to adopt the right attitude toward life. Moreover, the Qur'ān also elucidated those fundamental principles which, if followed, lead to man's success and happiness.

In keeping with the character of the mission at this stage the early revelations generally consisted of short verses, couched in language of uncommon grace and power, and clothed in a literary style suited to the taste and temperament of the people to whom they were originally addressed, and whose hearts they were meant to penetrate. The rhythm, melody and vitality of these verses drew rapt attention,

and such was their stylistic grace and charm that people began to recite them involuntarily.

The local colour of these early messages in conspicuous, for while the truths they contained were universal, the arguments and illustrations used to elucidate them were drawn from the immediate environment familiar to the first listeners. Allusions were made to their history and traditions and to the visible traces of the past which had crept into the beliefs, and into the moral and social life of Arabia. All this was calculated to enhance the appeal the message held for its immediate audience. This early stage lasted for four or five years, during which period the following reactions to the Prophet's message manifested themselves:

1. A few people responded to the call and agreed to join the *ummah* (community) committed, of its own volition, to submit to the Will of God.

2. Many people reacted with hostility, either from ignorance or egotism, or because of chauvinistic attachment to the way of life of their forefathers.

3. The call of the Prophet, however, did not remain confined to Makka or to the Quraysh. It began to meet with favourable response beyond the borders of that city and among other tribes.

The next stage of the mission was marked by a hard, vigorous struggle between the Islamic movement and the age-old Ignorance* (*Jāhilīyah*) of Arabia. Not only were the Makkans and the Quraysh bent upon preserving their inherited way of life, they were also firmly resolved to suppress the new movement by force. They stopped at nothing in the pursuit of this objective. They resorted to false propaganda; they spread doubt and suspicion and used subtle, malicious insinuations to sow distrust in people's minds. They tried to prevent people from listening to the message of the Prophet. They perpetrated savage cruelties on those who embraced Islam. They subjected them to economic and social boycott, and persecuted them to such an extent that on two occasions a number of them were forced to leave home and emigrate to Abyssinia, and finally they had to emigrate *en masse* to Madina.

* The author uses the term 'Ignorance' (*Jāhilīyah*) to denote all those world-views and ways of life which are based on the rejection or disregard of the heavenly guidance which is communicated to mankind through the Prophets and Messengers of God; the attitude of treating human life – either wholly or partly – as independent of the directives revealed by God. For this see the writings of the author, especially *Islam and Ignorance*, (Lahore, 1976), and *A Short History of the Revivalist Movements in Islam*, tr. al-Ash'ari, III edition, Lahore, 1976 – Ed.

In spite of this strong and growing resistance and opposition, the Islamic movement continued to spread. There was hardly a family left in Makka one of whose members at least had not embraced Islam. Indeed, the violence and bitterness of the enemies of Islam was due to the fact that their own kith and kin – brothers, nephews, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers-in-law and so on – had not only embraced Islam, but were even ready to sacrifice their lives for its sake. Their resistance, therefore, brought them into conflict with their own nearest and dearest. Moreover, those who had forsaken the age-old Ignorance of Arabia included many who were outstanding members of their Society. After embracing Islam, they became so remarkable for their moral uprightness, their veracity and their purity of character that the world could hardly fail to notice the superiority of the message which was attracting people of such qualities.

During the Prophet's long and arduous struggle God continued to inspire him with revelations possessing at once the smooth, natural flow of a river, the violent force of a flood and the overpowering effect of a fierce fire. These messages instructed the believers in their basic duties, inculcated in them a sense of community and belonging, exhorted them to piety, moral excellence and purity of character, taught them how to preach the true faith, sustained their spirit by promises of success and Paradise in the Hereafter, aroused them to struggle in the cause of God with patience, fortitude and high spirits, and filled their hearts with such zeal and enthusiasm that they were prepared to endure every sacrifice, brave every hardship and face every adversity.

At the same time, those either bent on opposition, or who had deviated from the right way, or who had immersed themselves in frivolity and wickedness, were warned by having their attentions called to the tragic ends of nations with whose fates they were familiar. They were asked to draw lessons from the ruins of those localities through which they passed every day in the course of their wanderings. Evidence for the unity of God and for the existence of the After-life was pointed to in signs visible to their own eyes and within the range of their ordinary experience. The weaknesses inherent in polytheism, the vanity of man's ambition to become independent even of God, the folly of denying the After-life, the perversity of blind adherence to the ways of one's ancestors regardless of right or wrong, were all fully elucidated with the help of arguments cogent enough to penetrate the minds and hearts of the audience.

Moreover, every misgiving was removed, a reasonable answer

was provided to every objection, all confusion and perplexity was cleared up, and Ignorance was besieged from all sides till its irrationality was totally exposed. Along with all this went the warning of the wrath of God. The people were reminded of the horrors of Doomsday and the tormenting punishment of Hell. They were also censured for their moral corruption, for their erroneous ways of life, for their clinging to the ways of Ignorance, for their opposition to Truth and their persecution of the believers. Furthermore, these messages enunciated those fundamental principles of morality and collective life on which all sound and healthy civilizations enjoying God's approval had always rested.

This stage was unfolded in several phases. In each phase, the preaching of the message assumed ever wider proportions, as the struggle for the cause of Islam and opposition to it became increasingly intense and severe, and as the believers encountered people of varying outlooks and beliefs. All these factors had the effect of increasing the variety of the topics treated in the messages revealed during this period. Such, in brief, was the situation forming the background to the Makkan *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.

V

For thirteen years the Islamic movement strove in Makka. It then obtained, in Madina, a haven of refuge in which to concentrate its followers and its strength. The Prophet's movement now entered its third stage.

During this stage, circumstances changed drastically. The Muslim community succeeded in establishing a fully-fledged state; its creation was followed by prolonged armed conflict with the representatives of the ancient Ignorance of Arabia. The community also encountered followers of the former Prophets, i.e. Jews and Christians. An additional problem was that hypocrites began to join the fold of the Muslim community; their machinations needed to be resisted. After a severe struggle, lasting ten years, the Islamic movement reached a high point of achievement when the entire Arabian peninsula came under its sway and the door was open to world-wide preaching and reform. This stage, like the preceding one, passed through various phases each of which had its peculiar problems and demands.

It was in the context of these problems that God continued to

reveal messages to the Prophet. At times these messages were couched in the form of fiery speeches; at other times they were characterized by the grandeur and stateliness of majestic proclamations and ordinances. At times they had the air of instructions from a teacher; at others the style of preaching of a reformer. These messages explained how a healthy society, state and civilization could be established and the principles on which the various aspects of human life should be based.

They also dealt with matters directly related to the specific problems facing the Muslims. For example, how should they deal with the hypocrites (who were harming the Muslim community from within) and with the non-Muslims who were living under the care of the Muslim society? How should they relate to the People of the Book? What treatment should be meted out to those with whom the Muslims were at war, and how should they deal with those with whom they were bound by treaties and agreements? How should the believers, as a community, prepare to discharge their obligations as vicegerents of the Lord of the Universe? Through the Qur'ān the Muslims were guided in questions like these, were instructed and trained, made aware of their weaknesses, urged to risk their lives and property for the cause of God, taught the code of morality they should observe in all circumstances of life – in times of victory and defeat, ease and distress, prosperity and adversity, peace and security, peril and danger.

In short, they were being trained to serve as the successors of the mission of the Prophet, with the task of carrying on the message of Islam and bringing about reform in human life. The Qur'ān also addressed itself to those outside the fold of Islam, to the People of the Book, the hypocrites, the unbelievers, the polytheists. Each group was addressed according to its own particular circumstances and attitudes. Sometimes the Qur'ān invited them to the true faith with tenderness and delicacy; on other occasions, it rebuked and severely admonished them. It also warned them against, and threatened them with, punishment from God. It attempted to make them take heed by drawing their attention to instructive historical events. In short, people were left with no valid reason for refusing the call of the Prophet.

Such, briefly, is the background to the Madinan *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.

It is now clear to us that the revelation of the Qur'ān began and went hand in hand with the preaching of the message. This message passed through many stages and met with diverse situations from the very beginning and throughout a period of twenty-three years.

The different parts of the Qur'ān were revealed step by step according to the multifarious, changing needs and requirements of the Islamic movement during these stages. It therefore could not possibly possess the kind of coherence and systematic sequence expected of a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, the various fragments of the Qur'ān which were revealed in harmony with the growth of the Islamic movement were not published in the form of written treatises, but were spread orally. Their style, therefore, bore an oratorical flavour rather than the characteristics of literary composition.

Furthermore, these orations were delivered by one whose task meant he had to appeal simultaneously to the mind, to the heart and to the emotions, and to people of different mental levels and dispositions. He had to revolutionize people's thinking, to arouse in them a storm of noble emotions in support of his cause, to persuade his Companions and inspire them with devotion and zeal, and with the desire to improve and reform their lives. He had to raise their morale and steel their determination, turn enemies into friends and opponents into admirers, disarm those out to oppose his message and show their position to be morally untenable. In short, he had to do everything necessary to carry his movement through to a successful conclusion. Orations revealed in conformity with the requirements of a message and movement will inevitably have a style different from that of a professorial lecture.

This explains the repetitions we encounter in the Qur'ān. The interests of a message and a movement demand that during a particular stage emphasis should be placed only on those subjects which are appropriate at that stage, to the exclusion of matters pertaining to later stages. As a result, certain subjects may require continual emphasis for months or even years. On the other hand, constant repetition in the same manner becomes exhausting. Whenever a subject is repeated, it should therefore be expressed in different phraseology, in new forms and with stylistic variations so as to ensure that the ideas and beliefs being put over find their way into the hearts of the people.

At the same time, it was essential that the fundamental beliefs and principles on which the movement was based should always be kept fresh in people's minds; a necessity which dictated that they should be repeated continually through all stages of the movement. For this reason, certain basic Islamic concepts about the unity of God and His Attributes, about the Hereafter, about man's accountability and about reward and punishment, about prophethood and belief in the revealed scriptures, about basic moral attributes such

as piety, patience, trust in God and so on, recur throughout the Qur'ān. If these ideas had lost their hold on the hearts and minds of people, the Islamic movement could not have moved forward in its true spirit.

If we reflect on this, it also becomes evident why the Prophet (peace be on him) did not arrange the Qur'ān in the sequence in which it was revealed. As we have noted, the context in which the Qur'ān was revealed in the course of twenty-three years was the mission and movement of the Prophet; the revelations correspond with the various stages of this mission and movement. Now, it is evident that when the Prophet's mission was completed, the chronological sequence of the various parts of the Qur'ān – revealed in accordance with the growth of the Prophet's mission – could in no way be suitable to the changed situation. What was now required was a different sequence in tune with the changed context resulting from the completion of the mission.

Initially, the Prophet's message was addressed to people totally ignorant of Islam. Their instruction had to start with the most elementary things. After the mission had reached its successful completion, the Qur'ān acquired a compelling relevance for those who had decided to believe in the Prophet. By virtue of that belief they had become a new religious community – the Muslim *ummah*. Not only that, they had been made responsible for carrying on the Prophet's mission, which he had bequeathed to them, in a perfected form on both conceptual and practical levels. It was no longer necessary for the Qur'ānic verses to be arranged in chronological sequence. In the changed context, it had become necessary for the bearers of the mission of the Prophet (peace be on him) to be informed of their duties and of the true principles and laws governing their lives. They also had to be warned against the deviations and corruptions which had appeared among the followers of earlier Prophets. All this was necessary in order to equip the Muslims to go out and offer the light of Divine Guidance to a world steeped in darkness.

It would be foreign to the very nature of the Qur'ān to group together in one place all verses relating to a specific subject; the nature of the Qur'ān requires that the reader should find teachings revealed during the Madinan period interspersed with those of the Makkan period, and vice versa. It requires the juxtaposition of early discourses with instructions from the later period of the life of the Prophet. This blending of teachings from different periods helps to provide an overall view and an integrated perspective of Islam, and acts as a safeguard against lopsidedness. Furthermore, a chronolog-

ical arrangement of the Qur'ān would have been meaningful to later generations only if it had been supplemented with explanatory notes and these would have had to be treated as inseparable appendices to the Qur'ān. This would have been quite contrary to God's purpose in revealing the Qur'ān; the main purpose of its revelation was that all human beings – children and young people, old men and women, town and country dwellers, laymen and scholars – should be able to refer to the Divine Guidance available to them in composite form and providentially secured against adulteration. This was necessary to enable people of every level of intelligence and understanding to know what God required of them. This purpose would have been defeated had the reader been obliged solemnly to recite detailed historical notes and explanatory comments along with the Book of God.

Those who object to the present arrangement of the Qur'ān appear to be suffering from a misapprehension as to its true purpose. They sometimes almost seem under the illusion that it was revealed merely for the benefit of students of history and sociology!

VI

The present arrangement of the Qur'ān is not the work of later generations, but was made by the Prophet under God's direction. Whenever a *sūrah* was revealed, the Prophet summoned his scribes, to whom he carefully dictated its contents, and instructed them where to place it in relation to the other *sūrahs*. The Prophet followed the same order of *sūrahs* and verses when reciting during ritual Prayer as on other occasions, and his Companions followed the same practice in memorizing the Qur'ān. It is therefore a historical fact that the collection of the Qur'ān came to an end on the very day that its revelation ceased. The One who was responsible for its revelation was also the One who fixed its arrangement. The one whose heart was the receptacle of the Qur'ān was also responsible for arranging its sequence. This was far too important and too delicate a matter for anyone else to dare to become involved in.

Since Prayers were obligatory for the Muslims from the very outset of the Prophet's mission,* and the recitation of the Qur'ān was an

* It should be noted that while the five daily Prayers were made obligatory several years after the Prophet was commissioned, Prayers were obligatory from the very outset; not a single moment elapsed when Prayers, as such, were not obligatory in Islam.

obligatory part of those Prayers, Muslims were committing the Qur'ān to memory while its revelation continued. Thus, as soon as a fragment of the Qur'ān was revealed, it was memorized by some of the Companions. Hence the preservation of the Qur'ān was not solely dependent on its verses being inscribed on palm leaves, pieces of bone, leather and scraps of parchment – the materials used by the Prophet's scribes for writing down Qur'ānic verses. Instead those verses came to be inscribed upon scores, then hundreds, then thousands, then hundreds of thousands of human hearts, soon after they had been revealed, so that no scope was left for any devil to alter so much as one word of them.

When, after the death of the Prophet, the storm of apostasy convulsed Arabia and the Companions had to plunge into bloody battles to suppress it, many Companions who had memorized the Qur'ān suffered martyrdom. This led 'Umar to plead that the Qur'ān ought to be preserved in writing, as well as orally. He therefore impressed the urgency of this upon Abū Bakr. After slight hesitation, the latter agreed and entrusted that task to Zayd ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī, who had worked as a scribe of the Prophet.*

The procedure decided upon was to try and collect all written pieces of the Qur'ān left behind by the Prophet, as well as those in the possession of his Companions.† When all this had been done, assistance was sought from those who had memorized the Qur'ān. No verse was incorporated into the Qur'ānic codex unless all three sources were found to be in complete agreement, and every criterion of verification had been satisfied. Thus an authentic version of the Qur'ān was prepared. It was kept in the custody of Ḥafṣah (a wife of the Holy Prophet) and people were permitted to make copies of it and also to use it as the standard of comparison when rectifying the mistakes they might have made in writing down the Qur'ān.

In different parts of Arabia and among its numerous tribes there existed a diversity of dialects. The Qur'ān was revealed in the language spoken by the Quraysh of Makka. Nevertheless, in the beginning, people of other areas and other tribes were permitted to recite it according to their own dialects and idiom, since this facilitated its recitation without affecting its substantive meaning. In the course of time, in the wake of the conquest of a sizeable part

* For an account of the early history of the Qur'ān see Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, 1977, pp. 65 ff. – Ed.

† There are authentic Traditions to the effect that several Companions had committed the entire Qur'ān, or many parts of it, to writing during the lifetime of the Prophet. Especially mentioned in this connection are the following Companions of the Prophet: 'Uthmân, 'Alī, 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Sâlim the mawlá of Ḥudhayfah, Mu'ādh b. Jabal, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Abū Zayd Qays b. al-Sakan.

of the world outside of the Arabian peninsula, a large number of non-Arabs entered the fold of Islam. These developments affected the Arabic idiom and it was feared that the continuing use of various dialects in the recitation of the Qur'ān might give rise to grave problems. It was possible, for instance, that someone hearing the Qur'ān recited in an unfamiliar dialect might pick a fight with the reciter, thinking that the latter was deliberately distorting the Word of God. It was also possible that such differences might gradually lead to tampering with the Qur'ān itself. It was also not inconceivable that the hybridization of the Arabic language, due to the intermixture between Arabs and non-Arabs, might lead people to introduce modifications into the Qur'ānic text, thus impairing the grace of the Speech of God. As a result of such considerations, and after consultation with the Companions of the Prophet, 'Uthmān decided that copies of the standard edition of the Qur'ān, prepared earlier on the order of Abū Bakr, should be published, and that publication of the Qur'ānic text in any other dialect or idiom should be proscribed.

The Qur'ān that we possess today corresponds exactly to the edition which was prepared on the orders of Abū Bakr and copies of which were officially sent, on the orders of 'Uthmān, to various cities and provinces. Several copies of this original edition of the Qur'ān still exist today. Anyone who entertains any doubt as to the authenticity of the Qur'ān can satisfy himself by obtaining a copy of the Qur'ān from any bookseller, say in West Africa, and then have a *ḥāfiẓ* (memorizer of the Qur'ān) recite it from memory, compare the two, and then compare these with the copies of the Qur'ān published through the centuries since the time of 'Uthmān. If he detects any discrepancy, even in a single letter or syllable, he should inform the whole world of his great discovery!

Not even the most sceptical person has any reason to doubt that the Qur'ān as we know it today is identical with the Qur'ān which Muḥammad (peace be on him) set before the world; this is an unquestionable, objective, historical fact, and there is nothing in human history on which the evidence is so overwhelmingly strong and conclusive. To doubt the authenticity of the Qur'ān is like doubting the existence of the Roman Empire, the Mughals of India, or Napoleon! To doubt historical facts like these is a sign of stark ignorance, not a mark of erudition and scholarship.

VII

The Qur'ān is a Book to which innumerable people turn for innumerable purposes. It is difficult to offer advice appropriate to all. The readers to whom this work is addressed are those who are concerned to acquire a serious understanding of the Book, and who seek the guidance it has to offer in relation to the various problems of life. For such people we have a few suggestions to make, and we shall offer some explanations in the hope of facilitating their study of the Qur'ān.

Anyone who really wishes to understand the Qur'ān, irrespective of whether or not he believes in it, must divest his mind, as far as possible, of every preconceived notion, bias and prejudice, in order to embark upon his study with an open mind. Anyone who begins to study the Qur'ān with a set of preconceived ideas is likely to read those very ideas into the Book. No book can be profitably studied with this kind of attitude, let alone the Qur'ān which refuses to open its treasure-house to such readers.

For those who want only a superficial acquaintance with the doctrines of the Qur'ān one reading is perhaps sufficient. For those who want to fathom its depths several readings are not even enough. These people need to study the Qur'ān over and over again, taking notes of everything that strikes them as significant. Those who are willing to study the Qur'ān in this manner should do so at least twice to begin with, so as to obtain a broad grasp of the system of beliefs and practical prescriptions that it offers. In this preliminary survey, they should try to gain an overall perspective of the Qur'ān and to grasp the basic ideas which it expounds, and the system of life that it seeks to build on the basis of those ideas. If, during the course of this study, anything agitates the mind of the reader, he should note down the point concerned and patiently persevere with his study. He is likely to find that, as he proceeds, the difficulties are resolved. (When a problem has been solved, it is advisable to note down the solution alongside the problem.) Experience suggests that any problems still unsolved after a first reading of the Qur'ān are likely to be resolved by a careful second reading.

Only after acquiring a total perspective of the Qur'ān should a more detailed study be attempted. Again the reader is well advised to keep noting down the various aspects of the Qur'ānic teachings. For instance, he should note the human model that the Qur'ān extols as praiseworthy, and the model it denounces. It might be helpful to make two columns, one headed 'praiseworthy qualities', the other

headed 'blameworthy qualities', and then to enter into the respective columns all that is found relevant in the Qur'ān. To take another instance, the reader might proceed to investigate the Qur'ānic point of view on what is conducive to human success and felicity, as against what leads to man's ultimate failure and perdition. An efficient way to carry out this investigation would be to note under separate headings, such as 'conducive to success' and 'conducive to failure', any relevant material encountered. In the same way, the reader should take down notes about Qur'ānic teachings on questions of belief and morals, man's rights and obligations, family life and collective behaviour, economic and political life, law and social organization, war and peace, and so on. Then he should use these various teachings to try to develop an image of the Qur'ānic teachings *vis-à-vis* each particular aspect of human life. This should be followed by an attempt at integrating these images so that he comes to grasp the total scheme of life envisaged by the Qur'ān.

Moreover, anyone wishing to study in depth the Qur'ānic viewpoint on any particular problem of life should, first of all, study all the significant strands of human thought concerning that problem. Ancient and modern works on the subject should be studied. Unresolved problems where human thinking seems to have got stuck should be noted. The Qur'ān should then be studied with these unresolved problems in mind, with a view to finding out what solutions the Qur'ān has to offer. Personal experience again suggests that anyone who studies the Qur'ān in this manner will find his problem solved with the help of verses which he may have read scores of times without it ever crossing his mind that they could have any relevance to the problems at hand.

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that full appreciation of the spirit of the Qur'ān demands practical involvement with the struggle to fulfil its mission. The Qur'ān is neither a book of abstract theories and cold doctrines which the reader can grasp while seated in a cosy armchair, nor is it merely a religious book like other religious books, the secrets of which can be grasped in seminaries and oratories. On the contrary, it is the blueprint and guidebook of a message, of a mission, of a movement. As soon as this Book was revealed, it drove a quiet, kind-hearted man from his isolation and seclusion, and placed him upon the battlefield of life to challenge a world that had gone astray. It inspired him to raise his voice against falsehood, and pitted him in a grim struggle against the standard-bearers of unbelief, of disobedience to God, of waywardness and error. One after the other, it sought out everyone who had a pure and noble soul, mustering them together under the standard of the

Messenger. It also infuriated all those who by their nature were bent on mischief and drove them to wage war against the bearers of the Truth.

This is the Book which inspired and directed that great movement which began with the preaching of a message by an individual, and continued for no fewer than twenty-three years, until the Kingdom of God was truly established on earth. In this long and heart-rending struggle between Truth and falsehood, this Book unfailingly guided its followers to the eradication of the latter and the consolidation and enthronement of the former. How then could one expect to get to the heart of the Qur'ānic truths merely by reciting its verses, without so much as stepping upon the field of battle between faith and unbelief, between Islam and Ignorance? To appreciate the Qur'ān fully one must take it up and launch into the task of calling people to God, making it one's guide at every stage.

Then, and only then, does one meet the various experiences encountered at the time of its revelation. One experiences the initial rejection of the message of Islam by the city of Makka, the persistent hostility leading to the quest for a haven of refuge in Abyssinia, and the attempt to win a favourable response from Ṭā'if which led, instead, to cruel persecution of the bearer of the Qur'ānic message. One experiences also the campaigns of Badr, of Uḥud, of Ḥunayn and of Tabūk. One comes face to face with Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab, with hypocrites and with Jews, with those who instantly respond to this call as well as those who, lacking clarity of perception and moral strength, were drawn into Islam only at a later stage.

This will be an experience different from any so-called 'mystic experience'. I designate it the 'Qur'ānic mystic experience'. One of the characteristics of this 'experience' is that at each stage one almost automatically finds certain Qur'ānic verses to guide one, since they were revealed at a similar stage and therefore contain the guidance appropriate to it. A person engaged in this struggle may not grasp all the linguistic and grammatical subtleties, he may also miss certain finer points in the rhetoric and semantics of the Qur'ān, yet it is impossible for the Qur'ān to fail to reveal its true spirit to him.

Again, in keeping with the same principle, a man can neither understand the laws, the moral teachings, and the economic and political principles which the Qur'ān embodies, nor appreciate the full import of the Qur'ānic laws and regulations, unless he tries to implement them in his own life. Hence the individual who fails to translate the Qur'ānic precepts into personal practice will fail to understand the Book. The same must be said of any nation that allows the institutions of its collective life to run contrary to the teachings of the Qur'ān.

VIII

It is well known that the Qur'ān claims to be capable of guiding all mankind. Yet the student of the Qur'ān finds that it is generally addressed to the people of Arabia, who lived in the time of its revelation. Although the Qur'ān occasionally addresses itself to all mankind its contents are, on the whole, vitally related to the taste and temperament, the environment and history, and the customs and usages of Arabia. When one notices this, one begins to question why a Book which seeks to guide all mankind to salvation should assign such importance to certain aspects of a particular people's life, and to things belonging to a particular age and clime. Failure to grasp the real cause of this may lead one to believe that the Book was originally designed to reform the Arabs of that particular age alone, and that it is only people of later times who have forced upon the Book an altogether novel interpretation, proclaiming that its aim is to guide all mankind for all time.

Some might say this with no other purpose than to vent their irrational prejudice against Islam. But leaving such people aside, a word may be said to those whose critical comments are motivated by the desire to understand things better. The latter would do well to study the Qur'ān carefully, noting down any place where they find that it has propounded either some doctrine or concept, or laid down some rule for practical conduct, relevant for the Arabs alone and exclusively conditioned by the peculiarities of a certain place or time. If, while addressing the people of a particular area at a particular period of time, attempting to refute their polytheistic beliefs and adducing arguments in support of its own doctrine of the unity of God, the Qur'ān draws upon facts with which those people were familiar, this does not warrant the conclusion that its message is relevant only for that particular people or for that particular period of time.

What ought to be considered is whether or not the Qur'ānic statements in refutation of the polytheistic beliefs of the Arabs of those days apply as well to other forms of polytheism in other parts of the world. Can the arguments advanced by the Qur'ān in that connection be used to rectify the beliefs of other polytheists? Is the Qur'ānic line of argument for establishing the unity of God, with minor adaptations, valid and persuasive for every age? If the answers are positive, there is no reason why a universal teaching should be dubbed exclusive to a particular people and age merely because it happened to be addressed originally to that people and at that

particular period of time. No philosophy, ideology or doctrine consists of mere abstractions and is totally unrelated to the circumstances in which it developed. Even if such an absolute abstraction were possible it would remain confined to the scraps of paper on which it was written and would fail totally to have any impact on human life.

Moreover, if one wishes to spread any intellectual, moral and cultural movement on an international scale, it is by no means essential, in fact it is not even useful, for it to start on a global scale. If one wishes to propagate certain ideas, concepts and principles as the right bases for human life, one should begin by propagating them vigorously in the country where the message originates, and to the people whose language, temperament, customs and habits are familiar to its proponents. It will thus be possible to transform the lives of the people into a practical model of the message. Only then will it be able to attract the attention of other nations, and intelligent people living elsewhere will also try to understand it and to spread it in their own lands.

Indeed, what marks out a time-bound from an eternal, and a particularistic national doctrine from a universal one, is the fact that the former either seeks to exalt a people or claims special privileges for it or else comprises ideas and principles so vitally related to that people's life and traditions as to tender it totally inapplicable to the conditions of other peoples. A universal doctrine, on the other hand, is willing to accord equal rights and status to all, and its principles have an international character in that they are equally applicable to other nations. Likewise, the validity of those doctrines which seek to come to grips merely with questions of a transient and superficial nature is time-bound. If one studies the Qur'ān with these considerations in mind, can one really conclude that it has only a particularistic national character, and that its validity is therefore time-bound?

IX

Those who embark upon a study of the Qur'ān often proceed with the assumption that this Book is, as it is commonly believed to be, a detailed code of guidance. However, when they actually read it, they fail to find detailed regulations regarding social, political and economic matters. In fact, they notice that the Qur'ān has not

laid down detailed regulations even in respect of such oft-repeated subjects as Prayers and *Zakāh* (Purifying Alms). The reader finds this somewhat disconcerting and wonders in what sense the Qur'ān can be considered a code of guidance.

The uneasiness some people feel about this arises because they forget that God did not merely reveal a Book, but that He also designated a Prophet. Suppose some laymen were to be provided with the bare outlines of a construction plan on the understanding that they would carry out the construction as they wished. In such a case, it would be reasonable to expect that they should have very elaborate directives as to how the construction should be carried out. Suppose, however, that along with the broad outline of the plan of construction, they were also provided with a competent engineer to supervise the task. In that case, it would be quite unjustifiable to disregard the work of the engineer, on the expectation that detailed directives would form an integral part of the construction plan, and then to complain of imperfection in the plan itself. (This analogy should elucidate the position of the Prophet *vis-à-vis* the Qur'ān, for he clarified and elaborated the Qur'ān, supplementing its broad general principles by giving them precise and detailed forms, and incorporating them into practical life, his own as well as that of his followers – Ed.)

The Qur'ān, to put it succinctly, is a Book of broad general principles rather than of legal minutiae. The Book's main aim is to expound, clearly and adequately, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Islamic programme for life. It seeks to consolidate these by appealing both to man's mind and to his heart. Its method of guidance for practical Islamic life does not consist of laying down minutely detailed laws and regulations. It prefers to outline the basic framework for each aspect of human activity, and to lay down certain guidelines within which man can order his life in keeping with the Will of God. The mission of the Prophet was to give practical shape to the Islamic vision of the good life, by offering the world a model of an individual character and of a human state and society, as living embodiments of the principles of the Qur'ān.

X

The Qur'ān is strong in its condemnation of those who indulge in schismatic squabbling after the Book of Allah has been revealed,

so causing a weakening of faith;* yet there has been considerable disagreement over the correct interpretations of the Qur'ānic injunctions, not only among later scholars, but even among the founders of the legal schools and the Successors.† Indeed, disagreement can be traced back even to the times of the Companions‡ of the Prophet. One can hardly point to a single Qur'ānic verse of legal import which has received complete unanimity as regards its interpretation. One is bound to ask whether the Qur'ānic condemnation applies to all who have disagreed in this way. If it does not, then what kind of schism and disagreement does the Qur'ān denounce?

This is quite a problem and its ramifications cannot be considered at length here. The reader may rest assured that the Qur'ān is not opposed to differences of opinion within the framework of a general agreement on the fundamentals of Islam and the broad unity of the Islamic community. In addition it is not opposed to disagreement arising from an earnest endeavour to arrive at the right conclusions on a particular subject; the only disagreements condemned by the Qur'ān are those arising out of egotism and perversity, leading to mutual strife and hostility.

The two sorts of disagreement are different in character and give rise to different results. The first kind is a stimulus to improvement and the very soul of a healthy society. Differences of this kind are found in every society whose members are endowed with intelligence and reason. Their existence is a sign of life, while their absence only serves to demonstrate that a society is made up not of intelligent men and women but rather of blocks of wood. Disagreements of the second kind, however, are of an altogether different character and lead to ruin and destruction of the people among whom they arise. Far from being a sign of health, their emergence is symptomatic of a grave sickness.

The first kind of disagreement exists among scholars who are all agreed that it is their duty to obey God and His Prophet. They also agree that the Qur'ān and the Sunnah are their main sources of guidance. Thus, when scholarly investigation on some subsidiary question leads two or more scholars to disagree, or when two judges disagree in their judgement on some dispute, they regard neither their judgement, nor the questions on which their opinion has been expressed, as fundamentals of faith. They do not accuse those who disagree with their opinion of having left the fold of true faith. What each does is rather to proffer his arguments showing that he has

* See Qur'ān 159; 30; 33; 3: 105; 8: 46 – Ed.

† The word 'Successors' has been used as the equivalent of *Tābi'ūn*, i.e. those who benefited from the Companions of the Prophet – Ed.

‡ The word 'Companions' has been used as the equivalent of *Ṣaḥābah*, i.e. those who, in a state of belief, enjoyed the companionship of the Prophet (peace be on him) – Ed.

done his best to investigate the matter thoroughly. It is then left to the courts (in judicial matters) and to public opinion (if the matter relates to the community at large) either to prefer whichever opinion seems the sounder, or to accept both opinions as equally permissible.

Schism occurs when the very fundamentals are made a matter of dispute and controversy. It may also happen that some scholar, mystic, *muftī*, or leader pronounces on a question to which God and His Messenger have not attached fundamental importance, exaggerating the significance of the question to such an extent that it is transformed into a basic issue of faith. Such people usually go one step further, declaring all who disagree with their opinion to have forsaken the true faith and set themselves outside the community of true believers. They may even go so far as to organize those who agree with them into a sect, claiming that sect to be identical with the Islamic community, and declaring that everyone who does not belong to it is destined to hell-fire!

Whenever the Qur'ān denounces schismatic disagreements and sectarianism, its aim is to denounce this latter kind of disagreement. As for disagreements of the first category, we encounter several examples of these even during the life of the Prophet. The Prophet not only accepted the validity of such disagreements, he even expressed approval of them. For this kind of disagreement shows that a community is not lacking in the capacity for thought, for enquiry and investigation, for grasping or wrestling with the problems it faces. It also shows that the intelligent members of the community are earnestly concerned about their religion and how to apply its injunctions to the problems of human life. It shows too that their intellectual capacities operate within the broad framework of their religion, rather than searching beyond its boundaries for solutions to their problems. And it proves that the community is following the golden path of moderation. Such moderation preserves its unity by broad agreement on fundamentals, and at the same time provides its scholars and thinkers with full freedom of enquiry so that they may achieve fresh insights and new interpretations within the framework of the fundamental principles of Islam.

XI

It is not intended here to survey all the questions which may arise in the mind of a student of the Qur'ān. Many questions relate to

specific *sūrahs* or verses, and are explained in the notes to these. This introduction confines itself to basic questions related to the understanding of the Qur'ān as a whole.

Sūrah 1

Al-Fātiḥah

(Makkan Period)

Title

The title *al-Fātiḥah* ('The Opening') reflects the content of this *sūrah*. *Al-Fātiḥah* signifies that which introduces either a subject or work, or that which marks an inauguration; it is thus equivalent to an 'Introduction' or a 'Foreword'.

Period of Revelation

This *sūrah* was revealed at the very outset of Muḥammad's prophethood. Indeed, we learn from authentic Traditions that this was the first complete *sūrah* to be revealed to him. Only a few verses (parts of the early *sūrahs* such as 96, 73 and 74) were revealed before this.

Subject Matter

Al-Fātiḥah is actually a prayer, which God teaches to all who embark upon the study of His Book. Its position at the beginning signifies that anyone who wants to benefit from the Book should first offer this prayer to the Lord of the Universe.

Man naturally prays only for what his heart desires, and only when he feels that the object of his desire is at the disposal of the One to Whom his prayer is addressed. The placing of this *sūrah* at the head of the Qur'ān is a sign that God urges man to read this Book with

the aim of discovering the right course in life, i.e. 'the straight way', to study it with the earnestness of a seeker after Truth, and never to forget that the real source of true knowledge is God Himself. The student of the Book should therefore begin by making a humble petition to Him for true guidance.

Once this is grasped, it becomes self-evident that in relation to the Qur'ān this opening *sūrah*, *al-Fātiḥah*, is not just an introduction or foreword; the relationship is really one of prayer and response. *Al-Fātiḥah* is a prayer from man, and the rest of the Qur'ān is God's response to this prayer. Man prays to God that He may show him the straight way, and in response to this prayer God offers the Qur'ān as the true guidance, the 'straight way', which man has sought and prayed for.

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.[1]

(1) Praise[2] be to Allah, the Lord[3] of the entire universe, ▶

1. One of the many good practices taught by Islam is that its followers should begin all their activities in the name of God. This principle, if consciously and earnestly followed, will necessarily yield three beneficial results. First, one will be able to restrain oneself from many a misdeed, since the habit of pronouncing the name of God is bound to make one wonder when about to commit some offence how such an act can be reconciled with the saying of God's holy name. Second, if a man pronounces the name of God before starting good and legitimate tasks, this act will ensure that both his starting point and his mental orientation are sound. Third – and this is the most important benefit – when a man begins something by pronouncing God's name, he will enjoy God's support and succour; God will bless his efforts and protect him from the machinations and temptations of Satan. For whenever man turns to God, God turns to him as well.

2. As we have already explained, the character of this *sūrah* is that of a prayer. The prayer begins with praise of the One to Whom our prayer is addressed. This indicates that whenever one prays one ought to pray in a dignified manner. It does not become a cultivated person to blurt out his petition. Refinement demands that our requests should be preceded by a wholehearted acknowledgement of the unique position, infinite benevolence and unmatched excellence of the One to Whom we pray.

Whenever we praise someone, we do so for two reasons. First, because excellence calls for praise, irrespective of whether that excellence has any direct relevance to us or not. Second, we praise one whom we consider to be our benefactor; when this is the case our praise arises from a deep feeling of gratitude. God is worthy of praise on both counts. It is incumbent on us to praise Him not only in recognition of His infinite excellence but also because of our feeling of gratitude to Him, arising from our awareness of the blessings He has lavished upon us.

It is important to note that what is said here is not merely that praise be to God, but that *all* praise be to God *alone*. Wherever there is any beauty, any excellence, any perfection – in whatever thing or in whatever shape it may manifest itself – its ultimate source is none other than God Himself. No human beings, angels, demigods, heavenly bodies – in short, no created beings – are possessed of an innate excellence; where excellence exists, it

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(2) the Merciful, the Compassionate,[4] (3) the Master of the Day of Recompense.[5]

is a gift from God. Thus, if there is anyone at all whom we ought to adore and worship, to whom we ought to feel indebted and grateful, towards whom we should remain humble and obedient, it is the *creator* of excellence, rather than its *possessor*.

3. In Arabic the word *Rabb* has three meanings: (i) Lord and Master; (ii) Sustainer, Provider, Supporter, Nourisher and Guardian, and (iii) Sovereign, Ruler, He Who controls and directs. God is the *Rabb* of the universe in all three meanings of the term.

4. Whenever we are deeply impressed by the greatness of something we try to express our feelings by using superlatives. If the use of one superlative does not do full justice to our feelings, we tend to re-emphasize the extraordinary excellence of the object of our admiration by adding a second superlative of nearly equivalent meaning.* This would seem to explain the use of the word *Raḥīm* following *Raḥmān*. The form of the word *Raḥmān* connotes intensity. Yet God's mercy and beneficence towards His creatures is so great, so extensive and of such an infinite nature that no one word, however strong its connotation, can do it full justice. The epithet *Raḥīm* was therefore added to that of *Raḥmān*.

5. God will be the Lord of the Day when all generations of mankind gather together in order to render an account of their conduct, and when each person will be finally rewarded or punished for his deeds. The description of God as Lord of the Day of Judgement following the mention of His benevolence and compassion indicates that we ought to remember another aspect of God as well – namely, that He will judge us all, that He is so absolutely powerful, that on the Day of Judgement no one will have the power either to resist the enforcement of punishments that He decrees or to prevent anyone from receiving the rewards that He decides to confer. Hence, we ought not only to love Him for nourishing and sustaining us and for His compassion and mercy towards us, but should also hold Him in awe because of His justice, and should not forget that our ultimate happiness or misery rests completely with Him.

* The author illustrates this by referring to some Urdu usages, which we have omitted – Ed.

(4) You alone do we worship,[6] and You alone do we turn to for help.[7]

(5) 'Direct us on to the Straight Way,[8] (6) the way of those whom You have favoured,[9] (7) who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray.'[10]

6. The term *'ibādah* is used in three senses: (i) worship and adoration; (ii) obedience and submission; and (iii) service and subjection. In this particular context the term carries all these meanings simultaneously. In other words, we say to God that we worship and adore Him, that we are obedient to Him and follow His will, and also that we are His servants. Moreover man is so bound to *none save God*, that none but He may be the subject of man's worship and total devotion, of man's unreserved obedience, of man's absolute subjection and servitude.

7. Not only do we worship God, but our relationship with Him is such that we turn to Him alone for help and succour. We know that He is the Lord of the whole universe and that He alone is the Master of all blessings and benefactions. Hence, in seeking the fulfilment of our needs we turn to Him alone. It is towards Him alone that we stretch forth our hands when we pray and supplicate. It is in Him that we repose our trust. It is therefore to Him alone that we address our request for true guidance.

8. We beseech God to guide us in all walks of life to a way which is absolutely true, which provides us with a properly-based outlook and sound principles of behaviour, a way which will prevent our succumbing to false doctrines and adopting unsound principles of conduct, a way that will lead us to our true salvation and happiness. This is man's prayer to God as he begins the study of the Qur'ān. It is, in short, to illuminate the truth which he often tends to lose in a labyrinth of philosophical speculation; to enlighten him as to which of the numerous ethical doctrines ensures a sound course of conduct; to show which of the myriad ways and by-ways is the clear, straight, open road of sound belief and right behaviour.

9. This defines the 'straight way' which we ask God to open to us. It is the way which has always been followed by those who have enjoyed God's favours and blessings. This is the way which has been trodden from the beginning of time by all those individuals and communities that have unfailingly enjoyed God's favours and blessings.

10. This makes it clear that the recipients of God's favour are not those who appear, briefly, to enjoy worldly prosperity and success; all too often, these people are among those whom God has condemned because they have lost sight of the true path of salvation and happiness. This negative explanation makes it quite clear that *in'ām* (favour) denotes all those real and abiding favours and blessings which one receives in reward for righteous conduct through God's approval and pleasure, rather than those apparent and fleeting favours which the Pharaohs, Nimrods and Korahs (Qārūns) used to receive in the past, and which are enjoyed even today by people notorious for oppression, evil and corruption.

Sūrah 2

Al-Baqarah

(Madinan Period)

Title

This *sūrah* is entitled *al-Baqarah* ('The Cow') because at one point it mentions the anecdote of the cow (see verses 66–73). Each *sūrah* of the Qur'ān covers such a wide range of subjects that comprehensive *sūrah* headings are impossible. The titles suggested by the Prophet (peace be on him), under instruction from God, are not so much headings as tags to differentiate the *sūrahs*. The name of this *sūrah*, 'The Cow', does not signify that the cow is its main theme, but merely marks it as the *sūrah* in which the cow is mentioned.

Period of Revelation

The greater part of this *sūrah* was revealed in the early Madinan period, soon after the migration of the Prophet to Madina. A small portion was revealed later, and is included here because its subject is in harmony with the earlier parts. Hence we find the verses prohibiting interest (verses 275 ff.) included in this *sūrah* even though they were revealed during the very last days of the Prophet's life. Moreover, the concluding verses were revealed in Makka but have been incorporated here because they fit into the overall framework.

Background

To appreciate this *sūrah* one must first grasp the historical background of its revelation:

(1) Until the time of migration *(Hijrah)*, the message of Islam was confined to Makka and was addressed mainly to the polytheists of Arabia, for whom it was altogether new and foreign. After his migration to Madina, however, the Prophet (peace be on him) found the Jews living in nearby settlements. They affirmed the unity of God and believed in prophethood, revelation, After-life and angels. They also recognized the religious Law revealed by God to Moses (peace be on him). In principle, their religion was the same as that being preached by Muḥammad (peace be on him). Over many centuries, however, they had passed through a process of degeneration which had left them far removed from their true religion.* Many non-Islamic concepts, for which there was no basis in the Torah, had crept into their beliefs. Their daily lives, too, had become overlaid with customs and usages which had no place in their original religion and for which there was no scriptural sanction.

In fact, they had totally distorted the Scriptures by mixing the word of man with the Word of God. They had mutilated whatever remained intact of the original Word of God by resorting to arbitrary interpretations and hair-splitting legal deductions and elaborations. Among them true religious spirit was already dead. What was left was a soulless body of outward observances. Their theologians and rabbis, their élite as well as their common men, had all become so totally enmeshed in corruption that their beliefs were warped, their moral standards in decline and their daily lives degenerate. Furthermore, they cherished their corrupt ways far too much to be prepared for any reform. This corruption had gone on for so many centuries that whenever someone arose among them who was inspired by religious ideals, who sought to lead them to a truly sincere religious life, they looked upon him as their greatest enemy and spared no effort to prevent him from succeeding in his mission.

The accretion of foreign elements, the mutilation of the true teachings of their faith, the hair-splitting interpretations and schismatic divisions, the preoccupation with the letter and disregard of the spirit and substance of God's directives, the heedlessness of God, and the worship of material benefits had all made deep inroads

* Some nineteen centuries had then elapsed since the time of Moses. According to Jewish historical sources, Moses died in 1272 B.C. The Prophet Muḥammad was entrusted with prophetic office in 610 C.E.

into their lives and had carried their degeneration to a point where they had even forgotten that they were 'Muslims'. In short, they acquired the characteristic traits now associated with the Jews and had turned their religion into a national heritage of the Israelites.

When the Prophet arrived in Madina, God instructed him to call the Jews to their true and original faith. This call is embodied roughly in the first sixteen sections (*rukū'*) of this *sūrah* (i.e. from the opening verse of the *sūrah* to verse 141). In these sections both the past of the Jews and their present moral and religious condition are subjected to severe criticism. Moreover, the principles of true faith are elucidated in contrast with the corrupted forms of religion and morality. All this clearly shows the kind of corruption that can overtake the followers of Prophets, and what constitutes a true religiousness as distinct from a mere outward observance of religious laws. It also demonstrates the fundamentals of true religious life and the things of real value in the sight of God.

(2) With the arrival of the Prophet (peace be on him) in Madina, the Islamic movement entered a new stage. In Makka the Prophet devoted himself almost exclusively to expounding the basic principles of the true faith and to the moral training of his followers. After the migration, however, people belonging to different tribes and areas of Arabia, and who had embraced Islam, began to concentrate in Madina. When these people, in co-operation with the local Muslims (*Anṣār*) (literally meaning 'Helpers'), laid the foundations of a small Islamic state God began to issue fundamental directives on social, economic, legal and political matters, explaining how a new order of life could be established on the basis of Islam. The last twenty-three sections of the *sūrah* (i.e. verse 141 to the end of this *sūrah*) consist mainly of such directives. Most of them were issued in the very early part of the Madinan period of the Prophet's life while the rest were issued later and in response to different requirements.

(3) With the migration to Madina, the struggle between Islam and unbelief entered a new phase. Hitherto, the message of Islam had been spread in the very heart of unbelief. People of various tribes stayed in their homelands even after they had embraced Islam, carrying on their missionary work there, even though they were persecuted and subjected to many wrongs. After the migration all these scattered Muslims gathered in Madina, formed a body-politic and established a small independent state. However, although they held a tiny piece of land the whole of Arabia was pitted against them, bent upon their extermination.

In these circumstances the very survival, let alone the success of this small group of people depended upon several factors. First, that they should propagate their beliefs with the utmost conviction in order to convert others. Second, that they should demonstrate the falsity of their opponents' standpoint so cogently and convincingly that there could remain no justifiable ground for any intelligent person to entertain any doubt on the question. Third, that they as the followers of the Prophet should not lose their nerve or become disheartened because they had been driven out of their homes and were faced, through the hostility and opposition of the whole country, with economic stringency, hunger, and constant insecurity and danger but that they should confront the situation with patience and fortitude. Fourth, that they should be prepared to resist with both courage and the force of arms the violent assault by which the enemy intended to frustrate their movement, and that in this resistance they should not heed the enemy's superiority in either numbers or material resources. Fifth, that they should be inspired with the zeal and boldness needed to establish the Islamic order; if they found the people of Arabia unprepared to allow the Islamic order to be established by peaceful means, they should not hesitate to smash their corrupt way of life, based as it was on an inherited tradition of pagan Ignorance.

(4) In this phase of the development of the Islamic movement a new element, the 'hypocrites', began to emerge. Although the first signs of hypocrisy had appeared during the last phase of the Prophet's life in Makka, the nature of that hypocrisy was different. The kind of 'hypocrites' found then were those who while recognizing the truth of Islam and claiming to believe in it were not prepared to sacrifice their material interests, run the risk of severing the relationship which bound them to others, and who shrank from the persecution and trial which used to afflict all those who responded to the call of Truth.

In Madina, we notice that in addition to hypocrites of this sort other kinds also began to enter the body politic of Islam. One group consisted of those who had no faith in Islam but had entered the ranks of the Muslim community merely in order to create mischief. Another group of hypocrites, conscious of the political dominance of the Muslims, considered it advantageous to gain acceptance as fellow Muslims. At the same time they maintained contacts with their enemies so that they could enjoy the best of both worlds; in this way they secured all the advantages of friendship with the two opposite camps and thus remained safe from any hostilities. There

was still another group of hypocrites – those who were in a state of ambivalence and indecision between Islam and Ignorance but who had embraced Islam because the majority of their tribe or family had done so. The final group consisted of those who, although they believed Islam to be true, found it difficult to forsake their inherited way of life, their superstitions, their customs and usages, and to discipline themselves to observe the moral restraints and fulfil the obligations prescribed by Islam.

At the time this *sūrah* was revealed these various kinds of hypocrites had just begun to appear and so God made only brief references to them. In the *sūrahs* revealed in subsequent years, references to the hypocrites became more elaborate and directives were issued regarding the members of each of their category since by then the characteristics and activities of the hypocrites became clearer.

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

(1) *Alif, Lām, Mīm.*[1] (2) This is the Book of Allah, there is no doubt in it;[2] it is a guidance for the pious,[3] ►

1. The names of letters of the Arabic alphabet, called *ḥurūf muqaṭṭa'āt*, occur at the beginning of several *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. At the time of the Qur'ānic revelation the use of such letters was a well-known literary device, used by both poets and orators, and we find several instances in the pre-Islamic Arabic literature that has come down to us.

Since the *muqaṭṭa'āt* were commonly used the Arabs of that period generally knew what they meant and so they did not present a puzzle. We do not notice, therefore, any contemporaries of the Prophet (peace be on him) raising objections against the Qur'ān on the ground that the letters at the beginning of some of its *sūrahs* were absurd. For the same reason no Tradition has come down to us of any Companion asking the Prophet about the significance of the *muqaṭṭa'āt*. Later on this literary device gradually fell into disuse and hence it became difficult for commentators to determine their precise meanings. It is obvious, however, that deriving right guidance from the Qur'ān does not depend on grasping the meaning of these vocables, and that anyone who fails to understand them may still live a righteous life and attain salvation. The ordinary reader, therefore, need not delve too deeply into this matter.

2. One obvious meaning of this verse is that this Book, the Qur'ān, is undoubtedly from God. Another possible meaning is that nothing contained in it can be subject to doubt. Books which deal with supernatural questions, with matters that lie beyond the range of sense perception, are invariably based on conjecture and their authors, despite their brave show of competence, are therefore not immune from a degree of scepticism regarding their statements. This Book, which is based wholly on Truth, a Book which is the work of none other than the All-Knowing God Himself is distinguishable from all other books. Hence, there is no room for doubt about its contents despite the hesitation some people might express either through ignorance or folly.

3. This means that while the Book is potentially for all, only those who possess certain qualities can benefit from it. The first such quality is piety: those who want to benefit should be disposed to distinguish between good

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(3) for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of human perception,[4] who establish Prayer[5] and spend out of what We have provided them,[6] ▶

and evil, and to shun evil and do good. Those who lead an animal existence, who never stop to consider whether their actions are either good or bad, who cynically follow the prevailing winds, who are helplessly tossed about by the animal desires that dominate their minds, such persons are altogether incapable of deriving any benefit from the guidance embodied in the Qur'ān.

4. This is the second prerequisite for deriving benefit from the Qur'ān. *Ghayb* signifies the verities which are hidden from man's senses and which are beyond the scope of man's ordinary observation and experience, for example the existence and attributes of God, the angels, the process of revelation, Paradise, Hell and so on. 'Belief in the *ghayb*' means having faith in such matters, based on an absolute confidence in the Messengers of God and despite the fact that it is impossible to experience them.

According to this verse, Qur'ānic guidance can prove helpful only to those prepared to affirm the truths of the suprasensory realm. People who make their belief in these questions conditional upon sensory perception of the object of belief, and who are not prepared even to consider the possibility of the existence of things that cannot be weighed or measured, cannot profit from this Book.

5. This is the third requirement. It is pointed out that those to whom belief means merely the pronouncement of a formula, who think that a mere verbal confession of faith is enough and that it makes no practical demands on them, can derive no guidance from the Qur'ān. To benefit from the Qur'ān it is essential that a man's decision to believe should be followed immediately by practical obedience to God.

Prayer is the first and continuing sign of practical obedience. No more than a few hours can pass after a man has embraced Islam than the *mu'adhdhin* calls to Prayer and it becomes evident whether or not the profession of faith has been genuine. Moreover, the *mu'adhdhin* calls to Prayer five times every day and whenever a man fails to respond to his call it becomes clear that he has transgressed the bounds of practical obedience. An abandonment of Prayer amounts to an abandonment of obedience. Obviously, if a man is not prepared to follow the directives of his guide, it is immaterial whether or not true guidance is available to him.

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(4) who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you,[7] and have firm faith in the Hereafter.[8] ►

It should also be noted that the expression 'establishment of Prayer' has a wider meaning than mere performance of Prayer. It means that the system of Prayer should be organized on a collective basis. If there is a person in a locality who prays individually but no arrangements are made for congregational Prayer, it cannot be claimed that Prayer is established in that locality.

6. This, the fourth prerequisite for a person to benefit from the Qur'ān, demands that the person concerned should neither be niggardly nor a worshipper of money. On the contrary, he should be willing to pay the claims on his property of both God and man, and should not flinch from making financial sacrifices for the sake of his convictions.

7. The fifth requirement is that one should believe in the Books revealed by God to His Prophets in the various ages and regions of the world, in the Book revealed to Muḥammad (peace be on him) as well as in those revealed to the other Prophets who preceded him. The door of the Qur'ān is closed to all those who do not consider it necessary for man to receive guidance from God. It is also closed to those who, even if they believe in the need for such guidance, do not consider it necessary to seek it through the channel of revelation and prophethood, but would rather weave their own set of ideas and concepts and regard them as equivalent to Divine Guidance.

This door is also closed to those who believe in Divine books as such, but confine this belief to those books accepted by their forefathers, and spurn Divine Guidance revealed to anyone born beyond their own racial and national boundaries. The Qur'ān excludes all such people and is prepared to open the source of its grace only to those who believe that mankind does require Divine Guidance, who acknowledge that this guidance does not come to people individually but reaches them through Prophets and Divine Books, and who are not given to racial or national chauvinism but are devotees of Truth alone, and are therefore prepared to submit to Divine Guidance wherever it be found.

8. Belief in the After-life is the sixth and last requirement. The term *al-Ākhirah* embraces a whole set of ideas:

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(5) Such people are on true guidance from their Lord; such are the truly successful.

(6) As for those who have rejected these truths[9] it is all the same whether or not you warn them, for they will never believe. (7) Allah has sealed their hearts[10] and their hearing, and a covering has fallen over their eyes. They deserve severe chastisement.

أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْۖ وَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾ خَتَمَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْۖ وَعَلَىٰٓ أَبْصَٰرِهِمْ غِشَٰوَةٌۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

(i) that man is not an irresponsible being, but is answerable to God for all his conduct in this world;

(ii) that the present order of the world is not timeless, but will come to an end at an appointed hour known only to God;

(iii) that when this world comes to an end God will bring into being another world in which He will resurrect, at one and the same moment, all the human beings ever born on earth. He will gather them together, examine their conduct and grant each one just reward for his actions;

(iv) that those who are accounted good in God's judgement will be sent to Heaven, and those judged by Him as evil-doers will be consigned to Hell;

(v) that the real measure of success and failure is not one's prosperity in the present life, but one's success or failure according to God's judgement in the Next.

Those who do not accept this set of beliefs can derive no benefit from the Qur'ān. For if a man is merely in a state of doubt and hesitation with regard to these matters – let alone disbelieving them – he cannot advance even one step forward along the path charted out by the Qur'ān.

9. That is, those people who do not meet these six requirements, or reject all or any one of the fundamentals set out above.

10. This does not mean that their rejection of the Truth is a consequence of God sealing their hearts. What is meant is that God sealed their hearts and ears as a consequence of their decision to reject the fundamentals of

(8) There are some who say: 'We believe in Allah and in the Last Day', while in fact they do not believe. (9) They are trying to deceive Allah and those who believe, but they do not realize that in truth they are only deceiving themselves.[11] (10) There is a disease in their hearts and Allah has intensified this disease.[12] A painful chastisement awaits them for their lying. (11) Whenever they are told: 'Do not spread mischief on earth', they say: 'Why! We indeed are the ones who set things right.' ►

وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ
وَبِٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَمَا هُم بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾
يُخَٰدِعُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟
وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّآ أَنفُسَهُمْ
وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾ فِى قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ
فَزَادَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مَرَضًا ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ
لَا تُفْسِدُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ
مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

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faith, of their deliberate choice of a path divergent from that charted out by the Qur'ān. Anyone who has worked for the dissemination of the Truth often finds that if, after full consideration, a person decides against a doctrine, his mind begins to move in a completely opposite direction so that he fails to appreciate anything that is explained to him. His ears become deaf, his eyes are blinded to the merits of that doctrine, and one gets the distinct impression that the person's heart has indeed been sealed.

11. These people delude themselves that their hypocritical behaviour will profit them when in fact it will prove harmful both in this world and the Next. A hypocrite may be able to fool people for a while, but it does not last long; his hypocrisy is ultimately seen through. As for the Next Life, it is obvious that his claim to be a true believer is contradicted by his own actions and is thus quite worthless.

12. 'Disease' here refers to the disease of hypocrisy. The statement that 'Allah has intensified this disease' means that He does not punish the hypocrites immediately but allows them to indulge in their hypocrisy and exult in the success of their ruses. This feeling of success intensifies their hypocrisy.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(12) They are the mischief-makers, but they do not realize it. (13) Whenever they are told: 'Believe as others believe',[13] they answer: 'Shall we believe as the fools have believed?'[14] Indeed it is they who are the fools, but they are not aware of it. (14) When they meet the believers, they say: 'We believe', but when they meet their evil companions,[15] in privacy, they say: 'Surely we are with you; we were merely jesting.' (15) Allah jests with them, leaving them to wander blindly on in their rebellion. ►

أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَٰكِن
لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا۟
كَمَآ ءَامَنَ ٱلنَّاسُ قَالُوٓا۟ أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَآ ءَامَنَ
ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ ۗ أَلَآ إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ وَلَٰكِن
لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ وَإِذَا لَقُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ قَالُوٓا۟ ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ
شَيَٰطِينِهِمْ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ
مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ ٱللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ
وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِى طُغْيَٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

13. They are being asked to become Muslims in the same manner as others of their community became Muslims – that is, honestly and sincerely.

14. They think that those people who sincerely embraced Islam and thereby exposed themselves to all kinds of trials and persecutions, and confronted risks and dangers, were merely fools. To them it seems sheer folly to invite the hostility of the entire land merely for the sake of Truth and righteousness. In their view, wisdom consists not in bothering oneself with the distinction between truth and falsehood, but in remaining concerned only with one's own interests.

15. 'Satan' in Arabic means refractory, rebellious and headstrong, and is used for both human beings and *jinn*. Although this word is generally used in the Qur'ān for the satans amongst the *jinn*, it is also used occasionally for human beings possessing satanic characteristics. The context generally explains whether the word 'satan' refers to *jinn* or to

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(16) These are the ones who have purchased error in exchange for guidance. This bargain has brought them no profit and certainly they are not on the right way. (17) They are like him who kindled a fire, and when it lit up all around him, Allah took away the light (of their perception) and left them in utter darkness where they can see nothing.[16] (18) They are deaf, they are dumb, they are blind;[17] they will never return (to the right way). ►

أُولَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشْتَرَوُا۟ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ
بِٱلْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَت تِّجَٰرَتُهُمْ
وَمَا كَانُوا۟ مُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ مَثَلُهُمْ
كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى ٱسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّآ
أَضَآءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُۥ ذَهَبَ ٱللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ
وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِى ظُلُمَٰتٍ لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾
صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْىٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

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human beings. In this particular case the word 'satans' refers to those influential leaders of the time who were in the vanguard of opposition and hostility to Islam

16. This means that two opposite effects emerged when a true servant of God radiated the light which made it possible to distinguish true from false and right from wrong, and made the straight way distinct from the ways of error. To those endowed with true perception, all truths became evident. But those who were almost blinded by the worship of their animal desires perceived nothing.

The expression, 'Allah took away the light of their perception' should not create the impression that these people were not responsible for their stumbling into darkness. Only those who do not seek the Truth, who prefer error to guidance and who are adamantly disinclined to pursue the Truth despite its luminosity, are deprived, by God, of the light of their perception. God simply enables such people to do what they wish.

17. They have become deaf to hear, dumb to utter and blind to perceive the truth.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(19) Or they are like those who encounter a violent rainstorm from the sky, accompanied by pitch-dark clouds, thunder-claps and flashes of lightning: on hearing thunder-claps they thrust their fingers into their ears in fear of death. Allah encompasses these deniers of the Truth.[18] (20) It is as if the lightning would snatch their sight; whenever it gleams a while for them they walk a little, and when darkness covers them they halt.[19] If Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight.[20] Surely Allah is All-Powerful.

أَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَٰتٌ
وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَٰبِعَهُمْ فِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِم
مِّنَ ٱلصَّوَٰعِقِ حَذَرَ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ مُحِيطٌۢ
بِٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾ يَكَادُ ٱلْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ
أَبْصَٰرَهُمْ ۖ كُلَّمَآ أَضَآءَ لَهُم مَّشَوْا۟ فِيهِ
وَإِذَآ أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا۟ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ
لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَٰرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

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18. By thrusting their fingers into their ears they temporarily deceive themselves into believing that they can escape the catastrophic end that awaits them. However, they cannot escape that end since God with all His might, encompasses them.

19. The first parable refers to those hypocrites who disbelieved completely but had become Muslims merely to further their worldly interests. The second parable refers to those who were prone to doubt and hesitation or whose faith was weak; who believed in the Truth but not to the extent of exposing themselves to hardships for its sake. The 'violent rainstorm' here alludes to Islam, which came to the world as a blessing. 'Pitch-dark clouds, thunder and lightning' refer to the trials, tribulations and difficulties which confronted the Islamic movement, owing to the violent opposition and resistance of those committed to Ignorance. The last part of the parable portrays the state of mind of the hypocrites. They move a little ahead when circumstances seem favourable, but when either difficulties cloud the horizon, or when they are given directives which run counter to their desires or inherited prejudices, they are seized with alarm and come to a halt.

(21) O mankind,[21] serve your Lord Who has created you as well as those before you; do so that you are saved.[22] (22) It is He Who has made the earth a resting-place for you, and the sky a canopy, and sent down water from above with which He brought forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not, then, set up rivals[23] to Allah when you know (the truth).

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱعۡبُدُواْ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِي
خَلَقَكُمۡ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ
تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ ٱلَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ
ٱلۡأَرۡضَ فِرَٰشٗا وَٱلسَّمَآءَ بِنَآءٗ وَأَنزَلَ
مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءٗ فَأَخۡرَجَ بِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ
رِزۡقٗا لَّكُمۡۖ فَلَا تَجۡعَلُواْ لِلَّهِ أَندَادٗا
وَأَنتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

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20. Just as God has completely deprived the first category of hypocrites of their 'light of perception', He could have rendered these other hypocrites totally blind and deaf. But it is not God's way to deprive anyone of sight and hearing while he is willing to see and hear. Hence, God allowed them to retain their sight and hearing to the extent they were prepared to see and hear the Truth.

21. Even though the message of the Qur'ān is addressed to all, benefiting from it depends on one's willingness and on God's succour in relation to that willingness. This is why the Qur'ān first explained which kind of people can and which kind of people cannot benefit from the Qur'ān. As this has been explained in the foregoing verses, the quintessence of the message to which the Qur'ān invites all mankind is now put forth.

22. So that you are saved from false beliefs and unrighteous conduct in this life, and from the punishment of God in the Next.

23. That is, when man recognizes that all those things were done by none but God, then worship, devotion and service must be exclusively for Him. For who besides the Creator can legitimately claim these things from man?

(23) If you are in any doubt whether it is We Who have revealed this Book to Our servant, then produce just a *sūrah* like it, and call all your supporters and seek in it the support of all others save Allah. Accomplish this if you are truthful.[24] (24) But if you fail to do this – and you will most certainly fail – then have fear of the Fire whose fuel is men and stones[25] and which has been prepared for those who deny the Truth.

وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ
عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِۦ وَادْعُوا
شُهَدَآءَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ
صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَن
تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا
النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Not to set up others as rivals to Allah means not to make anyone other than God the object of worship, service and obedience that one owes to God alone. Later on we shall see, in some detail, how the Qur'ān itself specifies the forms of worship and service which we owe exclusively to God, and wherein associating anyone else amounts to *shirk* (associating others with God in His divinity). This, the Qur'ān seeks to eradicate.

24. Before this, in Makka, opponents had often been challenged to produce anything of comparable merit if they believed the Qur'ān to be the work of a human being. In Madina the same challenge was reiterated. (For similar challenges made elsewhere in the Qur'ān, see 10: 38; 11: 13; 17: 88 and 52: 33–4.)

25. This suggests, in a subtle manner, that in the Next Life not only will the unbelievers become the fuel of hell-fire, but that the same fate will befall the idol-stones they worshipped and before which they had prostrated themselves. They will then know, for sure, how far their idols had any share in godhead.

(25) (O Prophet!) Announce glad tidings to those who believe in this Book and do righteous deeds (in accordance with its teachings), that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Their fruits will have such resemblance to those of the earth that whenever they will be provided with those fruits they will say: 'It was this which was granted to us on earth before.'[26] For them there shall be pure spouses,[27] and there they shall abide for ever.

وَبَشِّرِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟
ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّـٰتٍ تَجْرِى مِن
تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ ۖ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا۟ مِنْهَا
مِن ثَمَرَةٍ رِّزْقًا ۙ قَالُوا۟ هَـٰذَا ٱلَّذِى
رُزِقْنَا مِن قَبْلُ ۖ وَأُتُوا۟ بِهِۦ مُتَشَـٰبِهًا ۖ
وَلَهُمْ فِيهَآ أَزْوَٰجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَهُمْ
فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

26. The fruits of Paradise will not be so exotic in appearance as to be unfamiliar to people. They will resemble the fruits to which human beings are accustomed in this world, though infinitely excelling them in delicacy of taste. In appearance they may resemble, say mangoes, pomegranates and oranges, and the people of Paradise will be able to identify them as such. In taste, however, there will be no comparison between the terrestrial and heavenly fruits.

27. The Qur'ānic text has the Arabic word *azwāj* which means 'spouses' or 'couples', and embraces both husband and wife. The husband is the *zawj* of his wife, and vice versa. In the Next World, however, this relationship of spouses will be qualified by purity. If a man has been virtuous in this world while his wife has not, their relationship in the Next World will be sundered and the man will receive another spouse who will be pure and virtuous. On the other hand, if a virtuous woman has had an evil husband she will be tied in companionship with a virtuous man. Where husband and wife have both been virtuous their relationship will become everlasting.

(26) Behold! Allah is not ashamed to propound the parable of a gnat, or even of something more lowly.[28] On hearing these parables the believers know that it is the truth from their Lord, while those bent on denying the Truth say: 'What does Allah mean by these parables?' Thus He causes many to go astray just as He directs many to the right way.[29] He thereby causes to go astray only the transgressors,[30]

۞ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْىِۦٓ أَن يَضْرِبَ
مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ۚ فَأَمَّا
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ
ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَآ أَرَادَ
ٱللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا مَثَلًا ۘ يُضِلُّ بِهِۦ
كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِى بِهِۦ كَثِيرًا ۚ
وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِۦٓ إِلَّا ٱلْفَٰسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

28. Here an objection is indirectly refuted. At several places in the Qur'ān, spiders, flies, gnats and so on are mentioned in order to elucidate certain points. Opponents objected to this on the grounds that such objects were too lowly to find a place in the Book of God. They indicated that had the Qur'ān indeed been a revelation from God it would not have mentioned such trivial objects.

29. Those who do not wish to understand things and are not motivated by the urge to seek the truth become enmeshed in superficial questions relating to the Book of God, draw altogether erroneous conclusions when they encounter references to apparently insignificant things such as gnats, and are thereby thrown further and further away from the Truth. Those who seek the Truth and possess true perception, on the other hand, penetrate through these superficialities and perceive the gems of wisdom that they embody. This appreciation makes their hearts attest that such wisdom could have no other source than God Himself.

30. *Fāsiq* means transgressor, disobedient. (See also n. 33 below.)

(27) who break the covenant of Allah after its firm binding,[31] and cut asunder what Allah has commanded to be joined,[32] and spread mischief on earth.[33] They are the utter losers.

(28) How can you be ungrateful to Allah Who bestowed life upon you when you were lifeless, will later cause you to die and will again bring you back to life so that you will be returned to Him. ►

ٱلَّذِينَ يَنقُضُونَ عَهْدَ ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
مِيثَٰقِهِۦ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَآ أَمَرَ ٱللَّهُ بِهِۦٓ أَن
يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾
كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَكُنتُمْ
أَمْوَٰتًا فَأَحْيَٰكُمْ ۖ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ
ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ
تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

31. The injunctions or ordinances issued by a sovereign to his servants and subjects are termed *'aḥd* in Arabic since compliance with them becomes obligatory for the latter. *'Aḥd* has been used here in this sense. The *'aḥd* referred to signifies God's eternal command that all human beings are obliged to render their service, obedience and worship to Him alone. 'After its binding' refers to the promise made by mankind to remain faithful to the injunctions of God at the time of Adam's creation. (For details see verse 7: 172.)

32. That is, the transgressors strike their blows at those very relationships upon which the individual and collective well-being of mankind depends, and which God wants maintained on a sound basis. This small sentence is of great import as it embraces the whole of human morality and social life, and extends from relationships between individuals to those between nations. 'To cut asunder what Allah has commanded should be joined' does not merely signify the disruption of relationships between man and man; it forbids the establishment of all forms of human relationship except the right and permissible ones. For wrong and prohibited bonds between people have the same consequences as the disruption of the bonds of human relationship as such – namely, the corruption of man's moral and social order.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(29) It is He Who created for you all that is on earth and then turned above and fashioned it into seven heavens.[34] He knows all things.[35]

هُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ لَكُم مَّا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَسَوَّىٰهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَٰوَٰتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

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33. In these three sentences the nature of transgression and the attitude of transgressors is fully defined. To debase the relationship between man and God, and between man and man necessarily leads to 'mischief'. Those who spread this 'mischief' on earth are transgressors.

34. It is difficult to explain precisely what is meant by the 'seven heavens'. In all ages man has tried, with the help of observation and speculation, to conceptualize the 'heavens', i.e. that which lies beyond and above the earth. As we well know, the concepts that have thus developed have constantly changed. Hence it would be improper to tie the meaning of these words of the Qur'ān to any one of these numerous concepts. What might be broadly inferred from this statement is that either God has divided the universe beyond the earth into seven distinct spheres, or that this earth is located in that part of the universe which consists of seven different spheres.

35. In this sentence attention is drawn to two important facts. First, man is warned against disbelief and rebellion against God, for God knows all that man does and none of his actions are hidden from Him. Second, it is suggested to man that if he turns away from the All-Knowing God, from the One Who is the source of all knowledge, this can only leave him groping in the darkness of ignorance and error. When there is no source of true knowledge except God, and when that very light which alone can illuminate man's life can be obtained from none else but Him, what good can come out of deviation from the Truth?

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوٓا۟ أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(30) Just think[36] when your Lord said to the angels:[37] 'Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent[38] on earth', they said: 'Will You place on it one who will spread mischief and shed blood[39] while we celebrate Your glory and extol Your holiness?'[40] He said: 'Surely I know what you do not know.'[41] ►

36. Thus far man has been summoned to serve and obey God on the grounds that God is his creator and sustainer, that in His grasp lies man's life and death, that He alone is the Lord Who rules over the entire universe in which he lives. In view of this, the only attitude which can be deemed appropriate for man is one of service and subjection to God.

The same idea is presented in the following section, but supported on slightly different grounds – namely that God created man as His vicegerent. In this capacity, man is obliged not merely to serve and worship Him, but also to act in accordance with His instructions and guidance. The Qur'ān warns that if man allows himself to be misled by his arch-enemy, Satan, he will be guilty of the most serious rebellion and will have to face the consequences of his action.

In this connection the Qur'ān defines precisely the true nature of man and his correct position in the universe. It also enlightens us to a period of man's past which is otherwise inaccessible. What the Qur'ān tells us here, with its practical consequences, is of far greater value than knowledge derived by unearthing bones and pottery, and piecing together scattered fragments of information with the help of conjecture.

37. The word *malak* in Arabic means 'message-bearer'. Angels are not depersonalized and abstract forces, they are beings with personalities of their own and are employed by God for the administration of His universe. They are His faithful servants. Some people have incorrectly considered them to be, in some way or another, God's partners in His Lordship and Godhead, while others have considered them to be His kinsfolk, turning them into gods and worshipping them.

38. *'Khalīfah'* or vicegerent is one who exercises the authority delegated to him by his principal, and does so in the capacity of his deputy and agent. Hence, whatever authority he possesses is not inherently his own, but is

► *Translation continued on page 61.*

derived from, and circumscribed by, the limits set by his principal. A vicegerent is not entitled to do what he pleases, but is obliged to carry out the will of his master. If the vicegerent were either to begin thinking himself the real owner and to use the authority delegated to him in whatever manner he pleased, or if he were to acknowledge someone other than the real owner as his lord and master and to follow his directions, these would be deemed acts of infidelity and rebellion.

39. This was not said by way of objection or protest. It was said rather by way of inquiry and in order to satisfy their curiosity; it is inconceivable that the angels could object to any of God's decisions. The word 'vicegerent' suggested to them that the proposed species of creation would be placed on earth with some authority. It was incomprehensible to them how a species of being which had been invested with discretionary power and authority could conform with the overall order of the universe, which is based on absolute and involuntary subservience to the Will of God. They thought that investing anyone with authority in any part of the universe would lead to mischief and disorder. It is this aspect which the angels were curious about.

40. This does not mean that the angels considered themselves suitable for 'vicegerency'. They merely wanted to point out that God's orders were already being carried out fully, that they – the angels – were engaged in doing His will and that according to His Divine will the entire universe was kept in a state of absolute purity; moreover, God's glory was constantly being extolled and His holiness celebrated. Since all these things were being done, they wanted to ask what gap was still considered to exist that called for the creation of a new species of being to fill it.

The word *tasbīḥ* has two meanings: (i) to proclaim glory and (ii) to exert oneself earnestly and energetically. In the same way, *taqdīs* has two meanings: (i) to celebrate or proclaim holiness and (ii) to purify.

41. This was an answer to the latter doubt expressed by the angels. The angels were told that the reason for the appointment of a vicegerent was best known to God alone and could not be understood by them. Despite the services rendered by the angels, something over and above their work was still required. God decided, therefore, to create a new species of being in the world and to invest it with some authority.

(31) Then Allah taught Adam the names of all things,[42] and presented them to the angels and said: 'If you are right (that the appointment of man as vicegerent will cause mischief) then tell Me the names of these things.' (32) They said: 'Glory to You! We have no knowledge except what You taught us.[43] You, only You, are All-Knowing, All-Wise.' (33) Then Allah said to Adam: 'Tell them the names of these things'. And when he had told them the names of all things,[44] Allah said: 'Did I not say to you that I know everything about the heavens and the earth which are beyond your range of knowledge and I know all that you disclose and all that you hide?'

وَعَلَّمَ ءَادَمَ ٱلْأَسْمَآءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ
عَلَى ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنۢبِـُٔونِى
بِأَسْمَآءِ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ
﴿٣١﴾ قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا
مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ
﴿٣٢﴾ قَالَ يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ أَنۢبِئْهُم بِأَسْمَآئِهِمْ ۖ فَلَمَّآ
أَنۢبَأَهُم بِأَسْمَآئِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُل لَّكُمْ إِنِّىٓ
أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ
مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

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42. The nature of man's knowledge is such that he acquires information of different things through their names. Hence it might be said that the sum total of man's knowledge consists of the names of things. To teach Adam the names of all things means, therefore, imparting the knowledge of those things.

43. It seems that the knowledge of each angel and each genre of angel is confined to its own sphere of competence. The angels appointed to administer, let us say, things relating to air have full knowledge about this subject but have no knowledge, say, about water, and so on and so forth. Man's range of knowledge, however, is comprehensive. Even if man's information in a particular area may be narrower than that of the angel directly concerned with it, the total range of his knowledge has a comprehensiveness which has not been granted to the angels.

(34) And when We ordered the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam', all of them fell prostrate,[45] except Iblīs.[46]	وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ

44. This demonstration of Adam's capacity was an answer to the first of the doubts the angels had expressed. In this manner, they were made to realize that God had not only bestowed some authority upon man, but had also endowed him with knowledge. Fear of mischief and disorder through man's appointment as vicegerent is only one aspect of the matter. The other aspect is constructive and offsets man's potentiality for spreading mischief. For the wise will not sacrifice a major good for fear of a minor harm.

45. This signifies that all the angels whose jurisdiction embraces the earth and that part of the universe in which the earth is situated were ordered to devote themselves to man's service. Since man had been invested with authority on earth the angels were told that whenever man wanted to make use of the powers with which he had been invested by God, and which God of His own will had allowed him to use, they should co-operate with him and enable him to do whatever he wanted to do, irrespective of right and wrong.

This can be understood with reference to the manner in which government employees are required to work. When a sovereign appoints a governor or a magistrate, all government employees under his jurisdiction are duty-bound to obey him. As long as the sovereign permits the governor or magistrate to exercise authority on his behalf, people are required to obey him, irrespective of whether he exercises this authority judiciously or not. But as soon as the sovereign indicates to those employees that the governor or magistrate should be barred from doing something, the effective authority of the governor or the magistrate comes to an abrupt end. In fact, were the sovereign to issue the order that the governor be dismissed or imprisoned, the same employees who until then had been moving to and fro at his bidding would not feel hesitant in putting hand-cuffs on him and taking him to prison.

God's order to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam was of a similar nature. It is possible that prostration signifies the fact of their becoming yoked to man's service. At the same time it is also possible that they were ordered to perform the act of prostration itself as a sign of the envisaged relationship between angels and man. In my view the latter seems more plausible.

46. *Iblīs* literally means 'thoroughly disappointed; utterly in despair'. In Islamic terminology the word denotes the *jinn* who, in defiance of God's

He refused, and gloried in his arrogance and became one of the defiers.[47]

(35) And We said: 'O Adam, live in the Garden, you and your wife, and eat abundantly of whatever you wish but do not approach this tree[48] or else you will be counted among the wrong-doers.[49] ►

أَبَىٰ وَٱسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾
وَقُلْنَا يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ ٱسْكُنْ أَنتَ وَزَوْجُكَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ
وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا
وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ
ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

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command, refused to obey and to yoke himself to the service of Adam and his progeny and asked God to allow him a term when he might mislead and tempt mankind to evil and error. He is also called *al-Shayṭān* (Satan).

In fact Satan (or Iblīs) is not an abstract, impersonal force. Like human beings he is possessed of a specific personality. Moreover, one should not make the mistake of considering Satan an angel. Elsewhere the Qur'ān itself clearly states that he was a *jinn* and *jinn*, as we know, are an independent species, distinct from the angels. (See Qur'ān 18: 50.)

47. These words seem to indicate that in committing disobedience Iblīs was probably not alone. What seems to have been the case is that a section of the *jinn* was bent upon rebellion and the name of Iblīs is mentioned only because he was their leader and the most noted among them for his rebellion.

Another translation of this sentence could be: '. . . and he was of the defiers (*kāfirīn*)'. If this sense is correct, these words would signify that there was already a party of rebellious and recalcitrant *jinn* and that Iblīs belonged to that party. In the Qur'ān the word *shayāṭīn* (satans) denotes these *jinn* and their offspring. Hence, whenever the context itself does not indicate that the term has been used for human beings who possess satanic attributes, the word 'satans' should be understood to signify these satanic *jinn*.

48. This indicates that before man was sent to earth – the realm of his vicegerency – Adam and Eve were kept in Paradise in order to test them and their proclivities. A tree was chosen for this test and they were told not to approach it. They were also told that if they did approach it they would be reckoned as wrongdoers in the sight of God. It is unnecessary to delve into a discussion about what that tree was and what was the particular reason underlying the prohibition to approach it. The actual

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(36) But Satan caused both of them to deflect from obeying Our command by tempting them to the tree and brought them out of the state they were in, and We said: 'Get down all of you, henceforth, each of you is an enemy of the other,[50] and on earth you shall have your abode and your livelihood for an appointed time.'

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ ۖ وَقُلْنَا ٱهْبِطُوا۟ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ ۖ وَلَكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَٰعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

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reason for the prohibition was not that any particular evil inhered in the tree which could harm Adam and Eve, but rather to test how far they would follow the instructions of God and overcome the temptations of Satan. Anything that served this purpose was good enough, and this is why God has mentioned neither the name of the tree nor its attributes.

Moreover, for this kind of test Paradise was the best possible place. What God wanted to impress on man was that the only place that befits man's station is Paradise, and that if man turns from the course of obedience to God as a result of Satanic allurements, he will remain deprived of it in the Next Life even as he was deprived of it once before. The only way he can recover his true status and reclaim the lost Paradise is by resisting effectively the enemy who is always trying to drive him off the course of obedience to God.

49. The use of the word 'wrong-doer' is highly significant. 'Wrong-doing' consists in withholding someone's rights and the wrong-doer is one who withholds those rights from their legitimate claimants. Anyone who disobeys God withholds three major rights. The first is what is due to God, for He has the right to be obeyed. Second, there are the rights of all those things which a man employs in disobeying God. The parts of his body, his mental energy, his fellow-beings, those angels who, under Divine dispensation, have been appointed to enable him to achieve his aims, both righteous and unrighteous, the material objects which he employs in his acts of disobedience – all these have a rightful claim upon him to be used in ways that please God. But when he uses them in ways which displease God he commits wrong against them all. Third, he wrongs his own self which has the right to be saved from perdition. By inviting punishment from God because of his disobedience he wrongs his own self as well. It is for these reasons that the word 'wrong' is often used in the Qur'ān for sin, and the word 'wrong-doer' for sinner.

(37) Thereupon Adam learned from his Lord some words and repented[51] and his Lord accepted his repentance for He is Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.[52]

50. This means that Satan is the enemy of man, and vice versa. That Satan is the enemy of man is obvious enough, for he tries to drive him off the course of obedience to God and leads him to perdition, but one might wonder how man could be referred to as the enemy of Satan. The fact is that man's essential humanity makes this enmity incumbent upon him. Man, however, is often deceived by Satan and befriends him owing to the temptations that he holds out to him. This kind of friendship does not mean that the basic, irreconcilable clash of interests between man and Satan has been resolved. It only means that one of the two (Satan) has defeated and successfully trapped the other (man).

51. This means that when Adam became conscious of his act of sin and wanted to return from his state of disobedience to that of obedience, and when he tried to seek remission for his sin from God, he was unable to find the words to use in his prayer to God. In His Mercy God taught him the words with which he could pray.

The word *tawbah* basically denotes 'to come back, to turn towards someone'. *Tawbah*, on the part of man, signifies that he has given up his attitude of disobedience and has returned to submission and obedience to God. The same word used in respect of God means that He has mercifully turned towards His repentant servant so that the latter has once more become an object of His compassionate attention.

52. The Qur'ān refutes the doctrine that certain consequences necessarily follow from sins and that man must in all cases bear them. In fact this is one of the most misleading doctrines to have been invented by human imagination. If it were true it would mean that a sinner would never have the opportunity to have his repentance accepted. It is a mechanistic view of reward and punishment and thus prevents and discourages the sinner from trying to improve.

The Qur'ān, on the contrary, tells man that reward for good actions and punishment for bad ones rests entirely with God. The reward that one receives for good acts is not the natural consequence of those acts; it is rather due to the grace and benevolence of God and it is entirely up to Him to reward one or not. Likewise, punishment for evil deeds is not a

(38) We said: 'Get you down from here,[53] all of you, and guidance shall come to you from Me: then, whoever will follow My guidance need have no fear, nor shall they grieve. ▶

قُلْنَا ٱهْبِطُوا۟ مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُم مِّنِّى هُدًى فَمَن تَبِعَ هُدَاىَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

natural and unalterable consequence of man's acts. God has full authority to punish man for his sin as well as to pardon him.

God's grace and mercy, however, are interrelated with His wisdom. Since He is wise, He does not use His power arbitrarily. Hence, whenever God rewards a man for his good acts, He does so because the good was done with purity of intention and for the sake of pleasing God. And if God refuses to accept an act of apparent goodness, He does so because that act had merely the form or appearance of goodness, and was not motivated by the desire to please God.

In the same way God punishes man for those sins which he commits with rebellious boldness, and which whet his appetite for more rather than lead him to repentance. Similarly, in His mercy God pardons those sins which are followed by genuine repentance and readiness on the part of the sinner to reform himself. There is no need for the criminal to despair of God's grace and mercy, no matter how great a criminal he is. Nor is there any reason for even the most rabid disbeliever to despair, provided he recognizes his error, repents of his disobedience and is ready to replace his former disobedience with obedience.

53. The reiteration of this statement is significant. We have been told above that Adam repented and that his repentance was accepted by God. This means that the stain of sin was washed away and therefore no stain remained – neither on Adam nor on his progeny – that might require that God's only begotten son be sent to the world and be crucified, as Christians claim, so as to expiate for mankind's sin.

On the contrary, God not only accepted Adam's repentance but also honoured him by endowing him with prophethood so that he might be able to direct his children correctly. The repetition of the order to leave Paradise and go down to earth is aimed at driving home the point that earth was not created as a place of punishment for man. On the contrary, man was put on earth to serve as God's vicegerent there. It was only to test man and thereafter to equip him for the performance of God's vicegerency that man was placed temporarily in Paradise. (See also n. 48 above.)

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(39) But those who refuse to accept this (guidance) and reject Our signs as false[54] are destined for the Fire where they shall abide for ever.'[55]

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَكَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَآ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

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54. *Āyāt* is the plural of *āyah* which means a 'sign' or 'token' which directs one to something important. In the Qur'ān this word is used in four different senses. Sometimes it denotes a sign or indication. In certain other places the phenomena of the universe are called the *āyāt* (signs) of God, for the reality to which the phenomena point is hidden behind the veil of appearances. At times the miracles performed by the Prophets are also termed *āyāt* since they show that the Prophets were envoys of the Sovereign of the universe. Lastly, individual units of the Book of God are also called *āyāt* because they point to the ultimate reality, and because the substantive contents of the Book of God, its phraseology, its style, its inimitable literary excellence are clear tokens of the attributes of the Author of the Book. The sense in which the word *āyah* has been used in a particular verse becomes evident from the context of its occurrence.

55. This is a permanent directive from God to mankind which is valid from the beginning of life until the Day of Judgement. It is this which has been mentioned earlier as God's covenant (see n. 31 above).

It is not for man to prescribe the way of life which his fellow human beings should follow. In his double capacity as the subject and vicegerent of God, man is required to follow the way of life prescribed by his Lord. There are only two means of access to this way: either by direct revelation from God or by following one to whom God has revealed guidance. Nothing else can direct man to the way that enjoys God's approval and good pleasure. Resorting to any other means in quest of salvation is not only fundamentally mistaken but tantamount to rebellion.

The story of the creation of Adam and the origin of the human species occurs seven times in the Qur'ān, once in the verses just mentioned. For other references see 7: 11 ff., 15: 26 ff., 17: 61 ff., 18: 50, 20: 116 ff., 38: 71 ff. The story also occurs in the Bible in Genesis 1, 2 and 3. A comparative reading of the Qur'ānic and Biblical versions will enable the perceptive reader to detect the differences between the two.

The dialogue between God and the angels at the time of the creation of Adam is also mentioned in the Talmud. This account lacks the spiritual significance underlying the Qur'ānic version. Indeed, the Talmudic version additionally contains the following oddity: when the angels ask why men are being created, God replies that they are being created so that good people may be born among them. God refrains from mentioning the bad

(40) Children of Israel![56] Recall My favour which I had bestowed on you, and fulfil your covenant with Me and I shall fulfil My covenant with you, and fear Me alone.

people lest the angels disapprove the creation of man! (See Paul Isaac Hershon, *Talmudic Miscellany*, London, 1880, pp. 294–5.)

56. 'Israel' means the slave of God. This was the title conferred on Jacob (Ya'qūb) by God Himself. He was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. His progeny are styled the 'Children of Israel'.

Turning to the Qur'ānic text itself, it is noteworthy that the foregoing verses have been in the nature of introductory remarks addressed to all mankind. From the present section up to and including the fourteenth (verses 40–121), the entire discourse is addressed to the Children of Israel; only occasionally are the Christians and the pagans of Arabia addressed, and sometimes also the followers of the Prophet. When studying this discourse, the reader should be particularly aware of the following purposes:

The first purpose of this discourse is to invite those followers of the earlier Prophets who still had some element of righteousness and goodness to believe in the Truth preached by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and to join hands in promoting the mission he championed. In these sections they are told that the Qur'ān and the Prophet are bearers of the same message and mission preached by the earlier Prophets and Scriptures.

The earlier communities were entrusted with the Truth in order that, as well as following it themselves, they might call others towards it and try to persuade them to follow it. But instead of directing the world in the light of this truth, they themselves failed to follow the Divine Guidance and sank into degeneracy. Their history and their contemporary religious and moral condition bore out this degeneration.

They are also told that God has once again entrusted the same Truth to one of His servants and has appointed him to carry out the same mission as that of the earlier Prophets and their followers. What the Prophet has brought is, therefore, neither new nor foreign; it is their very own and they are asked to accept it as such. A fresh group of people has now arisen with the same mission they had, but which they failed to carry out. It is clearly their duty to support these people.

The second purpose of this discourse is to leave no reasonable justification for the negative Jewish attitude towards Islam, and to expose fully the true state of the religious and moral life of the Jews. This discourse makes it

clear that the religion preached by the Prophet was the same as that preached by the Prophets of Israel. So far as the fundamentals are concerned, nothing in the Qur'ān differs from the teachings of the Torah. It is also established that the Jews failed glaringly to follow the guidance entrusted to them, even as they had failed to live up to the position of leadership in which they had been placed. This point is established by reference to events of irrefutable authenticity.

Moreover, the way in which the Jews resorted to conspiracies and underhand machinations designed to create doubts and misgivings, the mischievous manner in which they engaged in discussions, the acts of trickery in which they indulged in wilful opposition to the Truth, and the vile tactics which they employed in order to frustrate the mission of the Prophet, were all brought into sharp relief so as to establish that their formal, legalistic piety was a sham. What lay behind it was bigotry, chauvinism and self-aggrandizement rather than an honest search for and commitment to the Truth. The plain fact was that they did not want goodness to flourish.

This candid criticism of the Jews had several salutary effects. On the one hand, it made the situation clear to the good elements among the Jews. On the other, it destroyed the religious and moral standing of the Jews among the people of Madina, and among the pagans of Arabia as a whole. Moreover, it undermined the morale of the Jews to such an extent that from then on they could not oppose Islam with a firmness born of strong inner conviction.

Third, the message addressed in the earlier sections to mankind as a whole is here elucidated with reference to a particular people. The example of the Jews is cited to show the tragic end that overtakes a people when it spurns Divine Guidance. The reason for choosing the Children of Israel as an example is that they alone, out of all the nations, constituted for four thousand years the continual embodiment of a tragedy from which many lessons could be learnt. The vicissitudes of fortune which visit a people, depending on whether they follow or refrain from following Divine Guidance, were all conspicuous in the history of this nation.

Fourth, this discourse is designed to warn the followers of Muḥammad (peace be on him) to avoid the same pitfalls as the followers of the earlier Prophets. While explaining the requirements of the true faith, it clearly specifies the moral weaknesses, the false concepts of religion, and the numerous errors in religious belief and practice which had made inroads among the Jews. The purpose is to enable Muslims to see their true path clearly and to avoid false ones. While studying the Qur'ānic criticism of the Jews and Christians, Muslims should remember the Tradition from the Prophet in which he warned them that they would so closely follow the ways of the earlier religious communities that if the latter had entered a lizard's burrow, so would the Muslims. The Prophet was asked: 'Do you mean the Christians and Jews, O Messenger of God?' The Prophet replied: 'Who else?' (See Bukhārī, 'I'tiṣām', 14; Muslim, ''Ilm', 6 – Ed.) This was not merely an expression of reproof. Thanks to the peculiar discernment

(41) And believe in the Book which I have revealed and which confirms the Scripture you already have, and be not foremost among its deniers. Do not sell My signs for a trifling gain,[57] and beware of My wrath. (42) Do not confound Truth by overlaying it with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the Truth.[58] ▶

وَءَامِنُوا بِمَآ أَنزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا
مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُونُوٓا أَوَّلَ كَافِرٍۭ بِهِۦ
وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِـَٔايَٰتِى ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا وَإِيَّٰىَ
فَٱتَّقُونِ ﴿٤١﴾ وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا ٱلْحَقَّ
بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا ٱلْحَقَّ وَأَنتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

and insight with which the Prophet was endowed, he knew the ways in which corruption encroaches upon the lives of the followers of the Prophets, and the different forms it assumes.

57. 'Trifling gain' refers to the worldly benefits for the sake of which they were rejecting God's directives. Whatever one may gain in exchange for the Truth, be it all the treasure in the world, is trifling; the Truth is of supreme value.

58. For the proper understanding of this verse we need to recall that in the time of the Prophet the Jews of Arabia were more learned than the Arabs. In fact, there were some Jewish scholars of Arabia whose fame had spread even beyond the confines of that land. For this reason the Arabs tended to be intellectually overawed by them. In addition, the influence of the Jews had become pervasive and profound by virtue of the pomp and pageantry of their religious rites, and the magical crafts and feats of exorcism for which they were famous. The people of Madina, in particular, were greatly under the spell of the Jews. These Jews made on them the sort of impression generally created on ignorant neighbours by a better educated, more refined and more conspicuously religious group.

It was natural in such circumstances that, when the Prophet began to preach his message, the ignorant Arabs should approach the Jews and ask their opinion of the Prophet and his teachings, particularly as the Jews also believed in Prophets and Scriptures. We find that this inquiry was often made by the Makkans, and continued to be addressed to the Jews after the Prophet arrived in Madina.

In reply to this query, however, the Jewish religious scholars never told the candid truth. It was impossible for them to say that the doctrine of monotheism preached by Muḥammad was incorrect, that there was any error in his teachings regarding the Prophets, the Divine Scriptures, the

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(43) Establish Prayer and dispense the Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*)[59] and bow in worship with those who bow. (44) Do you enjoin righteousness on people but forget your own selves even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense? (45) And resort to patience and Prayer for help.[60]

وَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ
وَٱرۡكَعُواْ مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ ۞ أَتَأۡمُرُونَ
ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلۡبِرِّ وَتَنسَوۡنَ أَنفُسَكُمۡ وَأَنتُمۡ
تَتۡلُونَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَۚ أَفَلَا تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾
وَٱسۡتَعِينُواْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِۚ

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angels and the Next Life and that there was any error in the principles of moral conduct which the Prophet propounded. At the same time, however, they were not prepared to make a straightforward affirmation of the truth of his teachings. In short, they neither categorically denied the Truth nor were prepared to accept it with open hearts.

Instead, they tried to plant insidious doubts in the minds of everybody who enquired about the Prophet and his mission. They sought to create one misgiving after another, disseminated new slanders, and tried to engage people's minds in all kinds of hypothetical problems so as to keep them in a state of doubt and uncertainty. They also tried to raise controversial issues which might keep people, including the followers of the Prophet, entangled in sterile debate. It is this attitude of the Jews to which the Qur'ān alludes when it asks them not to overlay the truth with falsehood, not to suppress and conceal it by resorting to false propaganda and mischievous campaigns of slander, and not to attempt to deceive the world by mixing truth with falsehood.

59. Prayer and Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*) have always been among the most important pillars of the Islamic faith. Like other Prophets, the Prophets of Israel laid great stress upon them. The Jews had, however, become very negligent about these duties. Congregational Prayer had all but ceased among them; in fact, a great majority of the Jews did not perform Prayers even individually. They had also not only ceased to pay Purifying Alms, but some had even gone so far as to make their living out of interest.

60. That is, if they feel difficulty in keeping to righteousness, the remedy lies in resorting to Prayer and patience. From these two attributes they will derive the strength needed to follow their chosen course.

Truly Prayer is burdensome for all except the devout (46) who realize that ultimately they will have to meet their Lord and that to Him they are destined to return.[61]

(47) Children of Israel! Recall My favour which I bestowed upon you exalting you above all nations.[62] (48) Fear the Day when no one shall avail another, when no intercession will be accepted, when no one will be ransomed, and no criminal receive any help.[63]

وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾
الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلَاقُو رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ
إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا
نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ
عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَّا تَجْزِي
نَفْسٌ عَن نَّفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا
شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

The literal meaning of '*ṣabr*' is to exercise restraint, to keep oneself tied down. It denotes the will-power, the firm resolve and the control over animal desires which enables man to advance along the path of his choice – the path that satisfies his heart and conscience – in utter disregard of the temptations within, and of all obstacles and opposition without. The purpose of this directive is to urge man to develop this quality and to reinforce it from the outside by means of Prayer.

61. This means that Prayer is an insufferable encumbrance and affliction for the man who tends not to want to obey God and to believe in the After-life. For the man who, of his own volition, has bowed his head in obedience to God and is conscious that he has to stand before God after death, it is failure to perform the Prayer, rather than its performance, that becomes intolerable.

62. This refers to that period of human history when, of all nations, only the Children of Israel possessed that knowledge of Truth which comes from God alone. At that time they were entrusted with the task of directing the nations of the world to righteousness; they were expected to serve God and to invite the rest of the world to do the same.

63. A major reason for the degeneration of the Israelites was the corruption of their beliefs about the After-life. They had succumbed to the illusion that since they were among the offspring of great Prophets,

(49) And recall[64] when We rescued you from the slavery of Pharaoh's people[65] who had afflicted you with dreadful suffering, slaying your males and sparing your females. That was a tremendous trial for you from your Lord.[66]

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَٰكُم مِّنْ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ
يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوٓءَ ٱلْعَذَابِ يُذَبِّحُونَ
أَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَآءَكُمْ ۚ وَفِى
ذَٰلِكُم بَلَآءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

(50) And recall when We split the sea, providing passage for you, and thus saved you and caused Pharaoh's people to drown before your very eyes.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمُ ٱلْبَحْرَ فَأَنجَيْنَٰكُمْ
وَأَغْرَقْنَآ ءَالَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنتُمْ
تَنظُرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

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that since they were related to those venerable saints and pious men who had dedicated themselves entirely to the service of God in the past, they would be forgiven by the grace of those great men. They believed that once they had bound themselves firmly to those men of God, it would become impossible for God to punish them. Such false reliance made them negligent of true religious piety and enmeshed them in a life of sin and wickedness. Hence, as well as reminding the Children of Israel of God's favour upon them, it was necessary to refute all the false ideas which they cherished.

64. From here on, through the several sections that follow, reference is made to the best-known episodes of Jewish history. As these episodes were known to every Jewish child, they are narrated briefly rather than in detail. This reference is intended to remind the Jews both of the favours with which the Israelites had been endowed by God and of the misdeeds with which they had responded to those favours.

65. We have rendered 'Āl Fir'awn' as 'Pharaoh's people'. This includes the members of the Pharaonic family as well as the aristocracy of Egypt.

66. The test was whether they would emerge from the crucible of persecution as pure gold, or as mere dross. The test also lay in whether or not, after their miraculous deliverance from so great a calamity, they would become grateful servants of God.

(51) And recall when We summoned Moses for a term of forty nights,[67] and then you set up the calf as your god in his absence.[68] You indeed committed a grave wrong. (52) Yet We pardoned you that you might be grateful.

(53) And recall (that while you were committing this wrong) We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion[69] that you are guided to the right way.

(54) And recall when (on returning with this favour) Moses said to his people: 'My people! You have wronged yourselves by taking the calf for god, so turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves.[70] This will be best for you in your Creator's sight.'

وَإِذْ وَٰعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰٓ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ
ٱتَّخَذْتُمُ ٱلْعِجْلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ وَأَنتُمْ
ظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنكُم مِّنۢ
بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَإِذْ
ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْفُرْقَانَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾ وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ
لِقَوْمِهِۦ يَٰقَوْمِ إِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ
أَنفُسَكُم بِٱتِّخَاذِكُمُ ٱلْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوٓا۟
إِلَىٰ بَارِئِكُمْ فَٱقْتُلُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمْ ذَٰلِكُمْ
خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِندَ بَارِئِكُمْ

67. When the Israelites reached the Sinai peninsula after their exodus from Egypt, God summoned Moses to the mountain for forty days and nights so that the nation which had now achieved independence could be taught law and morality. (See Exodus 24–31.)

68. The cult of cow-worship was widespread among Israel's neighbours. It was particularly common in Egypt and Canaan. After the time of Joseph, when the Israelites fell prey to degeneracy and became the slaves of the Copts, they were contaminated by many of the corrupt practices prevalent among their rulers. Cow-worship was one of them. (There is a detailed account of the episode of calf-worship in Exodus 32.)

69. 'Criterion' here means that understanding of religion which differentiates truth from falsehood, making each stand out distinctly.

Thereupon He accepted your repentance. Indeed He is Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.

(55) And recall when you said: 'O Moses, we will not believe in you until we clearly see Allah (speaking to you).' Thereupon a tremendous thunderbolt struck you before your very eyes. (56) Then We revived you after your extinction, that you might be grateful.[71]

فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَٰمُوسَىٰ لَن نُّؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَى ٱللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ ٱلصَّٰعِقَةُ وَأَنتُمْ تَنظُرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾ ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَٰكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

70. That is, they should put to death those of their own number who made the calf an object of worship and actually worshipped it.

71. The incident referred to here is the following. When Moses went to the mountain he had been ordered to bring with him seventy elders of Israel. Later, when God bestowed upon Moses the Book and the Criterion, he presented them to the people. Some mischief-makers, according to the Qur'ān, began to complain that they could not believe in something just because Moses claimed that God had spoken to him. This invited the wrath of God and they were punished. The Old Testament, however, has the following account:

'And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank' (Exodus 24: 10–11).

Interestingly, it is stated later in the same book that when Moses requested God to show him His glory, God rejected the request and said: 'You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live'. (See Exodus 33: 18–23.)

(57) And We caused a cloud to comfort you with shade,[72] giving you manna and the quails,[73] (saying): 'Eat of the good things that We have provided you as sustenance.' And by their sinning (your forefathers) did not wrong Us: it is they themselves whom they wronged.

وَظَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنزَلْنَا
عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ كُلُوا مِن
طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا
وَلَٰكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(58) And recall when We said: 'Go into this town[74] and eat abundantly of its food; but enter the gate prostrate, saying, "Repentance".[75] We will forgive you your sins and shall bestow more favour on the doers of good.'

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا ادْخُلُوا هَٰذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا
مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَادْخُلُوا
الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَّغْفِرْ
لَكُمْ خَطَايَاكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ
الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

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72. That is, God provided them with shade from clouds in the Sinai peninsula where there was no shelter from the heat of the sun.

It should be remembered that the Israelites had left Egypt in their hundreds of thousands. In Sinai, there were not even any tents in which they could shelter, never mind proper houses. But for the fact that God by His grace kept the sky overcast for a considerable period, these people would have been scorched to death by the heat of the sun.

73. Manna and quails constituted the natural food that was continually made available to them throughout the forty years of their wandering in the Sinai desert. Manna was like coriander seed. When the dew fell in the night, manna fell with it from above. By God's grace the quails were made available so plentifully that the entire nation was able to live on them alone and so escaped starvation. (For details regarding manna and quails see Exodus 16; Numbers 11: 7-9 and 31-2; Joshua 5: 12.)

74. It has not yet been possible to arrive at any conclusion about the identity of the locality mentioned here. The series of events in the context of which God's command to enter the city is mentioned belong to the period of the exodus of the Children of Israel in the Sinai peninsula. It is therefore probable that the place mentioned in this verse is some Sinaitic city. Another plausible suggestion is that it is Shattim, which was located

(59) Then the wrong-doers substituted another saying for that which had been given them; and so We sent down a scourge upon the wrong-doers from the heavens for their transgression.

(60) And recall when Moses prayed for water for his people and We replied: 'Strike the rock with your staff.' And there gushed out from it twelve springs[76] and each tribe knew its drinking-place. (Then you were directed): 'Eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah, and do not go about acting wickedly on earth, spreading mischief.'

فَبَدَّلَ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا۟ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ
ٱلَّذِى قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا۟ رِجْزًا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ بِمَا كَانُوا۟
يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾ ۞ وَإِذِ ٱسْتَسْقَىٰ
مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦ فَقُلْنَا ٱضْرِب
بِّعَصَاكَ ٱلْحَجَرَ ۖ فَٱنفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ
ٱثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا ۖ قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ
أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرَبَهُمْ ۖ كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ مِن
رِّزْقِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

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opposite Jericho on the eastern bank of the river Jordan. According to the Bible the Israelites conquered this town during the last years of the life of Moses. After the conquest the Israelites became so decadent that God smote them with a plague from which twenty-four thousand died (Numbers 25: 1–9).

75. God's command was to enter the city not with the arrogance of tyrannical conquerors, but with the humility of men of God (in the manner in which the Prophet would later enter Makka at the time of its conquest). As for '*ḥiṭṭah*', it could either mean that when they entered the town they should seek God's pardon for their sins or that instead of plundering and massacring people in the wake of their conquest, they should proclaim an amnesty.

76. This rock is still to be found in the Sinai and attracts tourists. It still bears the slits and cracks of the springs. The number of springs was twelve because the Israelite tribes were also twelve in number. God provided one spring for each tribe so that they would not fight each other for water.

(61) And recall when you said: 'O Moses, surely we cannot put up with one sort of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us what the earth produces – its herbs and its cucumbers and its corn and its lentils and its garlic and its onions.' Then Moses said: 'Will you take a meaner thing in exchange for what is better?[77] Go down to some city and there you shall get what you ask for.' And ignominy and wretchedness were pitched upon them and they were laden with the burden of Allah's wrath. This was because they denied the signs of Allah[78] and slew the Prophets unrightfully.[79] And all this, because they disobeyed and persistently exceeded the limits (of the Law).

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَٰمُوسَىٰ لَن نَّصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ
طَعَامٍ وَٰحِدٍ فَٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا
مِمَّا تُنۢبِتُ ٱلْأَرْضُ مِنۢ بَقْلِهَا
وَقِثَّآئِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسِهَا وَبَصَلِهَا ۖ
قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ ٱلَّذِى هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ
بِٱلَّذِى هُوَ خَيْرٌ ۚ ٱهْبِطُوا۟ مِصْرًا
فَإِنَّ لَكُم مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ ۗ وَضُرِبَتْ
عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلذِّلَّةُ وَٱلْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَآءُو
بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟
يَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ
ٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ بِغَيْرِ ٱلْحَقِّ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوا۟
وَّكَانُوا۟ يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

77. This does not mean that their real fault lay in asking for things which entailed cultivation instead of availing themselves of manna and quails which they received without any toil. What is emphasized here is that rather than being concerned with the great purpose for which they had been brought to the Sinai they relished the foods which gratified their palates to such a degree that they could not forgo them even temporarily (cf. Numbers 11: 4–9).

78. There are several ways in which one might deny the signs of God. First, one might refuse to accept those teachings of God which one found contrary to one's fancies and desires. Second, one might know that something is from God and yet wilfully flout it. Third, one might know well the import of God's directives and yet distort them.

79. The Israelites recorded their crimes in detail in their own history. Here are just a few examples from the Bible:

(1) After the death of Solomon the state of the Israelites was split into two: the State of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem, and the State of Israel with its capital in Samaria. This was followed by a series of wars between the two States so that the State of Judah sought the assistance of the Aramaean State of Damascus against its own kinsmen. At this, Hamani the seer went under God's direction to Asa the king and rebuked him. Instead of rectifying his behaviour, Asa was so angry that he put the seer in the stocks. (See 2 Chronicles 16: 7–10.)

(2) When Elijah denounced the Jews for their worship of Baal and invited them to return to monotheism, Ahab, the king of Israel pursued him for the sake of his pagan wife so that he had to take refuge in the mountains of the Sinai peninsula. On this occasion, according to the Bible, he said: '. . . the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away' (1 Kings 19: 14).

(3) The same king Ahab imprisoned another Prophet, Micah, for no other reason than that of speaking the truth. King Ahab ordered that he should be given only bread and water. (See 1 Kings 22: 26–7.)

(4) When idol-worship and moral corruption became prevalent in Judah and the Prophet Zechariah raised his voice against them, he was stoned to death in the very court of the house of the Lord. (See 2 Chronicles 24: 21.)

(5) When the Israelite State of Samaria was wiped out by the State of Jerusalem, the Prophet Jeremiah deplored the condition of the Israelites. He warned them that it was time they set about mending their ways otherwise they would face an even more calamitous end than that of Samaria. The response to this sincere preaching was abuse and curses: he was beaten, imprisoned, put in the stocks and lowered by ropes into a cistern, where he was left to die of hunger and thirst. He was also accused of various crimes, including treason and conspiracy. (See Jeremiah 15: 10; 18: 20–3; 20: 1–18; 36–40.)

(6) It is reported of another Prophet, Amos, that when he denounced the widespread errors and corruption in the State of Samaria and warned of the evil consequences that follow such misdeeds, he was condemned to exile and told to pursue his prophetic task somewhere beyond its frontiers. (See Amos 7: 10–13.)

(7) When John the Baptist protested against the acts of moral corruption that were brazenly practised in his court, Herod, the ruler of Judah, first put John into prison, then had him beheaded at the request of a dancing girl, and had his head set on a platter and presented to the girl. (See Mark 6: 17–29.)

(8) The same hostility to Prophets is evident from the life of Jesus. The priests and political leaders of Israel ultimately became inflamed against Jesus, who criticized them for their impiety and hypocrisy and invited them

(62) Whether they are the ones who believe (in the Arabian Prophet), or whether they are Jews, Christians or Sabians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and do righteous deeds – their reward is surely secure with their Lord; they need have no fear, nor shall they grieve.[80]

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟
وَٱلنَّصَـٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّـٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا
فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

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to true faith and righteousness. It was this which prompted them to prepare a false case against him and persuade the Romans to sign a death sentence. Later, when the Roman governor, Pilate, asked them which of the two prisoners – Jesus or Barabbas, a notorious brigand – should be released on the occasion of the feast, they asked for the release of Barabbas and for the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27: 20–6).

This is a shameful chapter in the record of the Jewish nation, to which the Qur'ān refers here in passing. It is evident that when a nation chooses its most notoriously criminal and wicked people for positions of leadership, and its righteous and holy men for gaol and the scaffold, God has no alternative but to lay His curse and damnation on that nation.

80. The context of the verse makes it clear that it is not attempting to enumerate in detail all the articles of faith in which one should believe, or all the principles of conduct which one should follow in order to merit reward from God. These matters are mentioned elsewhere, in their appropriate places. The aim of the verse is merely to repudiate the illusion cherished by the Jews that, by virtue of their being Jews, they have a monopoly of salvation. They had long entertained the notion that a special and exclusive relationship existed between them and God. They thought, therefore, that all who belonged to their group were predestined to salvation regardless of their beliefs and actions, whereas all non-Jews were predestined to serve as fodder for hell-fire.

To clarify this misgiving the Jews are told that what really matters in the sight of God is true faith and good deeds rather than formal affiliation with a certain religious community. Whoever has true faith and good deeds to his credit is bound to receive his reward, since God will judge people on the basis of merit rather than on the grounds that a man's name happens to be listed in the world as a member of one religious community or the other.

(63) And recall when We made a covenant with you and caused the Mount to tower above you,[81] (saying): 'Hold fast to the Book that We have given you, and remember the directives and commandments in it, that you be pious.' (64) Then you turned away from your covenant, and had it not been for Allah's grace and mercy upon you, you would have long been utter losers.

(65) And you know the case of those of you who broke the Sabbath,[82] how We said to them: 'Become apes, despised and hated.'[83] ▶

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَٰقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ
ٱلطُّورَ خُذُوا مَآ ءَاتَيْنَٰكُم بِقُوَّةٍ
وَٱذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ ثُمَّ
تَوَلَّيْتُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ
ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُۥ لَكُنتُم مِّنَ
ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱعْتَدَوْا مِنكُمْ فِى ٱلسَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ
كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَٰسِـِٔينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

81. From the manner in which this incident is described at various places in the Qur'ān it is obvious that, at that time, it was quite well known to the Israelites. It is difficult, however, after the passage of many centuries to be able to speak with certainty about the precise nature of the incident. All we can say is that while the Children of Israel were making their covenant in the shadow of Mount Sinai, they witnessed an awesome phenomenon and felt as if the mountain was about to fall upon them. Verse 171 of *Sūrah al-A'rāf* seems to portray this. (See also n. 132 in that *sūrah*.)

82. Sabbath, i.e., Saturday. It was laid down that the Israelites should consecrate that day for rest and worship. They were required to abstain from all worldly acts, including cooking (which they might neither do themselves, nor have their servants do for them). The injunctions in this connection were so strict that violation of the Sabbath was to be punished with death. (See Exodus 31: 12–17.) When religious and moral decadence, however, spread among the Israelites they indulged in open desecration of the Sabbath, so much so that in Jewish towns trade and commerce were carried out in broad daylight.

83. The details of this incident are mentioned later in *Sūrah* 7, vv. 163 ff. The exact manner in which their transformation into apes took place is

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(66) And thus We made their end a warning for the people of their own time and for the succeeding generations, and an admonition to the God-fearing.

(67) And then recall when Moses said to his people: 'Behold, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow.' They said: 'Are you jesting with us?' Moses answered: 'I seek refuge in Allah that I should behave in the manner of the ignorant.' (68) They said: 'Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us what she is like.' Moses answered: 'He says, she is a cow, neither old nor immature, but of an age in between the two. Do, then, what you have been commanded.' (69) They said: 'Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us of what colour she is.' Moses answered: 'He says, she is a yellow cow, with a bright colour which is pleasing to those who see!' ►

فَجَعَلْنَٰهَا نَكَٰلًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا
وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾
وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِۦٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تَذْبَحُوا۟ بَقَرَةً ۖ قَالُوٓا۟ أَتَتَّخِذُنَا
هُزُوًا ۖ قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِٱللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ
ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾ قَالُوا۟ ٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ
يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا هِىَ ۚ قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ
لَّا فَارِضٌ وَلَا بِكْرٌ عَوَانٌۢ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ
فَٱفْعَلُوا۟ مَا تُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ قَالُوا۟
ٱدْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا لَوْنُهَا ۚ
قَالَ إِنَّهُۥ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَآءُ
فَاقِعٌ لَّوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ ٱلنَّٰظِرِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

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disputed. Some scholars are of the opinion that the transformation was a physical one, while others hold that they were invested with the attributes characteristic of apes. But both the words and the manner in which this incident is recounted in the Qur'ān seem to suggest that what took place was a physical transformation of certain persons into apes rather than just a moral metamorphosis. What seems plausible to me is that while their minds were allowed to remain intact, their bodies were changed into those of apes.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(70) They said: 'Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us what cow she is. Cows seem much alike to us, and if Allah wills, we shall be guided.' (71) Moses answered: 'Lo! He says, she is a cow unyoked to plough the earth or to water the tillage, one that has been kept secure, with no blemish on her!' Thereupon they cried out: 'Now you have come forth with the information that will direct us aright.' And they slaughtered her although they scarcely seemed to do so.[84]

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّن لَّنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ
الْبَقَرَ تَشَابَهَ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ
لَمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا
بَقَرَةٌ لَّا ذَلُولٌ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا تَسْقِي
الْحَرْثَ مُسَلَّمَةٌ لَّا شِيَةَ فِيهَا قَالُوا
الْآنَ جِئْتَ بِالْحَقِّ فَذَبَحُوهَا
وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

84. Through contact with neighbouring peoples, the Israelites had become infested with the attitude of sanctifying the cow, in fact they had even become accustomed to cow-worship. In order to disabuse the Jews of this, they were ordered to slaughter the cow. Their professed belief that God alone was worthy of worship could be tested only by making them slaughter with their own hands what they had formerly worshipped. This test was indeed a hard one since their hearts were not fully imbued with faith. Hence, they tried to shelve the issue by resorting to enquiries about the kind of animal they were required to slaughter. But the more they enquired, the narrower the strait became for them, until the indications were as obvious as if someone had put his finger precisely on the particular animal they were required to slaughter – the animal which had for so long been an object of their worship. The Old Testament also mentions the incident, but there is no reference to the manner in which the Jews tried to evade the matter. (See Numbers 19: 1–10.)

(72) And recall when you killed a man and then began to remonstrate and cast the blame (of killing) upon one another even though Allah was determined to bring to light what you were hiding. (73) Then We ordered: 'Smite the corpse with a part of it.' Thus does Allah bring the dead to life and thus does He show His signs that you might understand.[85] (74) Then (even after observing this) your hearts hardened and became like stones, or even harder. For surely there are some stones from which streams burst forth and some that split asunder and water issues out, and some that crash down for fear of Allah. Allah is not heedless of the things you do.

وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَّارَءْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ
مُخْرِجٌ مَا كُنتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ فَقُلْنَا
اضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَٰلِكَ يُحْيِي اللَّهُ
الْمَوْتَىٰ وَيُرِيكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ
ذَٰلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً
وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ
الْأَنْهَٰرُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَّقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ
مِنْهُ الْمَآءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ
خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا
تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

85. At least one thing becomes clear from this statement: that the slain person was restored to life at least long enough to indicate his assassins. But the actual words in which the order 'smite the corpse with a part of it' is couched tend to create a measure of ambiguity. Nevertheless, the meaning inferred by the early Qur'ānic commentators – that the order was to smite the slain man's body with some part of the slaughtered cow – seems to me plausible. Two birds were thus killed with one stone: first, they were made to behold a sign of God's power; and second, the notion that the cow possessed any holiness or sanctity was shattered. For if the object of their worship – the cow – had any supernatural power, some calamity should have visited them as a consequence of slaughtering it. But no calamity took place. On the contrary, killing the cow seemed to be beneficial insofar as striking a dead man with a part of it brought him back to life.

(75) Do you hope that these people will believe in the message you are preaching,[86] even though a party of them has been wont to listen to the Word of Allah and after they had fully grasped it knowingly distorted it?[87] ►

۞أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَٰمَ ٱللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُۥ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

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86. This is addressed to the converts of Madina, who had then lately embraced the faith of the Arabian Prophet. These people had some vague notions about Prophethood, Heavenly Scriptures, Angels, the After-life, Divine Law and so on, and for this they were indebted to their Jewish neighbours. It was from these same Jewish neighbours that they had heard that another Prophet was about to appear, and that his followers would prevail over the rest of the world.

It was partly because of this background that when the people of Madina heard about the Prophet, they readily turned towards him and embraced Islam in large numbers. They naturally expected that those who already followed Prophets and Divine Scriptures, and who, by introducing them to these ideas had contributed to their embracing the true faith, would not only join the ranks of the true believers, but would even be amongst their vanguard. As a result of these expectations the enthusiastic Muslim converts approached their Jewish friends and neighbours and invited them to embrace Islam. When the Jews flatly declined to do so, this negative reply was exploited by the hypocrites and other enemies of Islam as an argument for creating doubts about the truth of Islam.

If Muḥammad was the true Prophet, they argued, how was it conceivable that the Jewish scholars and divines would deliberately turn away from him since, if he was a true Prophet, such a behaviour would be tantamount to ruining their After-life? Here the simple-hearted Muslims learn of the historical record of the Jews, a record which is replete with perversion and corruption. This was designed to make them realize that they ought not to expect too much of a people with so dark a past, for if they were not realistic in their expectations about them they would be utterly disappointed when their call failed to penetrate their hardened and stony hearts. Their chronic decadence had a history of several centuries. For a long time they had treated those verses of the Scriptures which made sincere believers tremble in awe as objects of jest and play. They had tailored religion to suit their base desires and it was around such a perverted view of religion that all their hopes of salvation were centred. It was futile to hope that such people would flock to the call of Truth the moment it was proclaimed.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(76) And when they meet those who believe [in Muhammad] they say: 'We too believe in him.' But in their intimate meetings they say to one another: 'How foolish! Why should you intimate to them what Allah has revealed to you, for they will use it as argument against you before your Lord?'[88] (77) Are they unaware that Allah knows all that they hide and all that they disclose? ►

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا
وَإِذَا خَلَا بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ قَالُوا
أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُم بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
لِيُحَاجُّوكُم بِهِ عِندَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا
تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ
يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

87. 'A party of them' refers to the scholars and religious doctors of the Jewish community. The 'Word of God' here signifies the Torah, the Psalms (Zabūr) and other Scriptures which the Jews had received through the Prophets. 'Distortion' denotes the attempt to twist a text in such a manner as to make it signify something different from its real meaning, and may also denote tampering with the text of the Scriptures. The Israelite scholars had subjected the Scriptures to distortions of both kinds.

88. When the Jews talked among themselves they asked their co-religionists to disclose to the Muslims neither the prophesies about the Prophet, nor those verses of the Scriptures on the basis of which they could be reproached for their evil conduct; they thought that the Muslims would make use of scriptural arguments against them before God, and would thus have them pronounced guilty. These were the depths to which Jewish religious decadence had sunk. They were convinced that if they could succeed in concealing their guilt in this world, they would be saved from censure in the Next. For this reason they were asked if they considered God to be unaware of their deeds, either apparent or hidden.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(78) Among them are also the unlettered folk who do not know about the Scriptures but cherish baseless wishes and merely follow their conjectures.[89] (79) Woe, then, to those who write out the Scriptures with their own hands and then in order to make a trifling gain claim: 'This is from Allah.'[90] Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they thus earn. ►

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُّونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ إِلَّآ أَمَانِىَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا
يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَٰذَا مِنْ
عِندِ ٱللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا۟ بِهِۦ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ
فَوَيْلٌ لَّهُم مِّمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ
وَوَيْلٌ لَّهُم مِّمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

89. This was the state of the Jewish masses. They were ignorant of the Scriptures, unaware of the principles of faith as enunciated by God in His Book, unaware of the rules of conduct that He had laid down, and of the teachings which are of fundamental importance for man's salvation. Because they lacked this knowledge, they fabricated a whole religion out of their desires and fancies, living in a paradise built on false hopes and illusions.

90. These observations relate to their rabbis. They were not content with misinterpreting the Word of God. They also interjected into it their readings of the Scriptures and their explanatory comments thereof, stories from their national history, superstitious ideas and fancies, philosophical doctrines and legal rules. The result was that the Divine and the human became inextricably mixed. They claimed, nevertheless, that the entire thing was divine! Every historical anecdote, the interpretation of every commentator, the doctrine of every theologian, and the legal deduction of every jurist that managed to find its way into the Bible became the 'Word of God'. It was thus obligatory to believe in all that, and every deviation from it became tantamount to deviation from the true faith.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(80) And they say: 'The Fire will certainly not touch us except for a limited number of days.'[91] Say (to them): 'Have you received a promise from Allah – for Allah never breaks His promise – or do you attribute to Allah something about which you have no knowledge?' (81) Those who earn evil and are encompassed by their sinfulness are the people of the Fire, and there they will abide; (82) those who believe and do righteous deeds are the people of the Garden, and there they will abide.

(83) And recall when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: 'You shall serve none but Allah and do good to parents, kinsmen, orphans and the needy, you shall speak kindly to men, and establish Prayer and give Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*). ▶

وَقَالُوا۟ لَن تَمَسَّنَا ٱلنَّارُ إِلَّآ
أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَةً ۚ قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِندَ
ٱللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَن يُخْلِفَ ٱللَّهُ عَهْدَهُۥٓ ۖ أَمْ
تَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٨٠﴾ بَلَىٰ مَن كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً
وَأَحَٰطَتْ بِهِۦ خَطِيٓـَٔتُهُۥ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا
خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٨١﴾ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟
وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا
خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَٰقَ
بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ
وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ
وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَقُولُوا۟
لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ
وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ

91. This is a misconception entertained by all Jews, laymen as well as rabbis. They felt sure that no matter what they did, they would remain immune from hell-fire just by virtue of being Jews! The worst they could conceive of was the possibility of a transient punishment before they were transported to heaven.

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

And yet, except for a few of you, you turned back on this covenant, and you are still backsliders. (84) And recall when We made a covenant with you, that you shall not shed one another's blood, and shall not turn out one another from your homelands; you confirmed it, and you yourselves are witnesses to it. (85) And here you are, killing one another, turning out a party of your own from their homelands, aiding one another against them in sin and enmity, and if they come to you as captives you ransom them although the very act of expelling them was unlawful to you. Do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest?[92] What else, then, could be the retribution of those among you who do this than that they should live in degradation in the present life, and that on the Day of Resurrection they should be sent to the severest chastisement? Allah is not heedless of what you do.

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنكُمْ
وَأَنتُم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا
مِيثَٰقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَآءَكُمْ
وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنفُسَكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ
ثُمَّ أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾ ثُمَّ
أَنتُمْ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ
وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنكُم مِّن
دِيَٰرِهِمْ تَظَٰهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِٱلْإِثْمِ
وَٱلْعُدْوَٰنِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَٰرَىٰ
تُفَٰدُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
إِخْرَاجُهُمْ ۚ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ
ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ۚ
فَمَا جَزَآءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَٰلِكَ
مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ
ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَيَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَشَدِّ
ٱلْعَذَابِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا
تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

92. Before the advent of the Prophet (peace be on him) the Jewish tribes who lived on the outskirts of Madina had concluded an alliance with the Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj. When the Arab tribes fought against one another each Jewish tribe fought on the side of its allies, which led to fratricide and so to a flagrant violation of the Book of God. Moreover, when the war ended the captives were ransomed. This ransom was justified on the basis of scriptural arguments; they extolled the Word of God when

(86) These are the ones who have bought the present life in exchange for the World to Come. Their chastisement shall not be lightened, nor shall they be helped.

(87) And We gave Moses the Scripture and caused a train of Messengers to follow him and then sent Jesus, the son of Mary, with clear proofs and supported him with the spirit of holiness.[93] But, is it not true that every time a Messenger brought to you something that was not to your liking, you acted arrogantly: you called some Messengers liars and killed others? (88) They say: 'Our hearts are well-protected.'[94] No! The fact is that Allah has cursed them because of their denying the Truth. So, scarcely do they believe. ▶

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوُا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا
بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ
وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾ وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا
مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِن بَعْدِهِ
بِالرُّسُلِ وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ
الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ
أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰ
أَنفُسُكُمُ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ
وَفَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾ وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا
غُلْفٌ بَل لَّعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا
مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

it permitted the ransom of prisoners of war, but attached no significance at all to the same Word of God when it prohibited mutual feuding.

93. The 'spirit of holiness' signifies the knowledge derived through revelation. It also signifies the angel Gabriel who brought this revelation. It also denotes the holy spirit of Jesus, the spirit which God had endowed with angelic character.

The expression 'clear proofs' refers to those signs which are likely to convince a truth-seeking and truth-loving person that Jesus is a Prophet of God.

94. They said, in effect, that they were so staunch in their beliefs that their convictions would remain unaffected regardless of what was said. Such a claim is the hallmark of those bigots whose minds are seized by

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(89) And now that there has come to them a Book from Allah, how are they treating it? Even though it confirms the Truth already in their possession, and even though they had prayed for victory against the unbelievers, and even when that Book came to them – and they recognized it – they refused to acknowledge its truth.[95] Allah's curse be upon the disbelievers. ▶

وَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمۡ كِتَٰبٞ مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ
مُصَدِّقٞ لِّمَا مَعَهُمۡ وَكَانُواْ مِن قَبۡلُ
يَسۡتَفۡتِحُونَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ
فَلَمَّا جَآءَهُم مَّا عَرَفُواْ كَفَرُواْ
بِهِۦۚ فَلَعۡنَةُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى ٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

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irrational prejudice. Nothing can be a matter of greater shame for human beings than the so-called firmness of conviction which they often boast of. What can be more foolish than adherence to inherited beliefs and convictions when their falseness is established by overwhelmingly strong arguments?

95. Before the advent of the Prophet, the Jews were eagerly awaiting a Prophet whose coming had been prophesied by their own Prophets. In fact, the Jews used to pray for his advent so that the dominance of the unbelievers could come to an end and the age of their own dominance be ushered in. The people of Madina were witnesses to the fact that these same Jewish neighbours of theirs had yearned for the advent of such a Prophet. They often used to say: 'People may oppress us today as they wish, but when our awaited Prophet comes, we will settle our scores with our oppressors.'

Since the people of Madina had themselves heard such statements they were inclined to embrace the religion of the Prophet all the more readily lest their Jewish neighbours supersede them in acquiring this honour. It was therefore astonishing for them to find that when the promised Prophet did appear those same Jews who had so eagerly looked forward to welcoming him turned into his greatest enemies.

The statement 'and they recognized it' is confirmed by several contemporaneous events. The most authentic evidence in this connection is that of Ṣafīyah, a wife of the Prophet, who was herself the daughter of one learned Jewish scholar (Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭab) and the niece of another (Abū Yāsir). She says that when the Prophet migrated to Madina both her father

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▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(90) Evil indeed is what they console themselves with.[96] They deny the guidance revealed by Allah, grudging that He chose to bestow His gracious bounty (of revelation and prophethood) on some of His servants whom He willed.[97] Thus they have brought on themselves wrath after wrath, and a humiliating chastisement is in store for such unbelievers.

(91) When they are told: 'Believe in what Allah has revealed', they say: 'We believe only in what was revealed to us (Israel)'. They deny everything else even though it be the Truth which confirms the Truth already in their possession. ►

بِئْسَمَا اشْتَرَوْا بِهِۦٓ أَنفُسَهُمْ أَن
يَكْفُرُوا بِمَآ أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ بَغْيًا أَن
يُنَزِّلَ اللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ عَلَىٰ مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ
عِبَادِهِۦ فَبَآءُو بِغَضَبٍ عَلَىٰ غَضَبٍ
وَلِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿٩٠﴾
وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا بِمَآ أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ
قَالُوا نُؤْمِنُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا
وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَآءَهُۥ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ
مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ

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and uncle went to meet him and conversed with him for quite a while. When they returned home, she heard the following conversation:

> Uncle: Is he really the same Prophet whose advent has been prophesied in our Scriptures?
> Father: By God, he is.
> Uncle: Do you believe that?
> Father: Yes.
> Uncle: Then what do you intend to do?
> Father: I will continue to oppose him and will not let his claim prevail as long as I live.

(Ibn Hishâm, *Sīrah*, eds., Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā' et al., 2 vols., II edition, Cairo, 1375/1955, see vol. 1, pp. 518 f. See also Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muḥammad*, tr. and notes by A. Guillaume, London, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 241 f. – Ed.)

► *Translation continued on next page.*

Say (to them): 'If indeed you are believers, why is it that in the past you killed the Prophets of Allah (who were from Israel)?' (92) Moses came to you with clear proofs and yet you were so wont to wrong-doing that as soon as he was gone you took to worshipping the calf. (93) Recall the covenant We made with you and caused the Mount to tower above you stressing: 'Hold to what We have given you with full strength and give heed to it.' But their forefathers said: 'We hear, but we disobey' – for their hearts were overflowing with love for the calf because of their unbelief. Say: 'If you are men of faith, then evil are the things that your faith enjoins upon you.'

قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنۢبِيَآءَ ٱللَّهِ مِن قَبْلُ إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩١﴾ ۞ وَلَقَدْ
جَآءَكُم مُّوسَىٰ بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ ثُمَّ
ٱتَّخَذْتُمُ ٱلْعِجْلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ وَأَنتُمْ
ظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾ وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا
مِيثَٰقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ
ٱلطُّورَ خُذُوا۟ مَآ ءَاتَيْنَٰكُم
بِقُوَّةٍ وَٱسْمَعُوا۟ ۖ قَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا
وَعَصَيْنَا وَأُشْرِبُوا۟ فِى قُلُوبِهِمُ
ٱلْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ ۚ قُلْ
بِئْسَمَا يَأْمُرُكُم بِهِۦٓ إِيمَٰنُكُمْ إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

96. Another possible rendering of the same verse is: 'And how evil is that for the sake of which they have sold themselves', i.e. for the sake of which they have sacrificed their ultimate happiness and salvation.

97. They had longed for the promised Prophet to arise from among their own people. But when he arose among a different people, a people they despised, they decided to reject him. It was as if they thought God was duty-bound to consult them in appointing Prophets, and since in this case He had failed to do so they felt they had a right to be offended by God's 'arbitrariness'.

(94) Say to them: 'If indeed the Last Abode with Allah is yours, in exclusion of other people, then long for death[98] if you indeed speak truly.' (95) But they shall never long for it because of what their hands have already wrought, and Allah is well aware of the wrong-doers. (96) You will certainly find them most eager to cling on to life,[99] indeed even more eager than those who associate others with Allah in His divinity. Every one of them wishes to live a thousand years although the grant of long life cannot remove him from his chastisement. Allah sees whatever they do.

قُلْ إِن كَانَتْ لَكُمُ ٱلدَّارُ ٱلْآخِرَةُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّن دُونِ ٱلنَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُا۟ ٱلْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾ وَلَن يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًۢا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾ وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْرَصَ ٱلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيَوٰةٍ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا۟ ۚ يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحْزِحِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلْعَذَابِ أَن يُعَمَّرَ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

98. This is a subtle, satirical reference to their excessive worldliness. Those who really care for the Hereafter neither set their hearts on earthly life, nor are they unduly frightened of death. The condition of the Jews was the reverse of this.

99. The Arabic text implies that the Jews were so frightened of death and so keen to remain alive that they did not mind whether they led an honourable and dignified existence, or whether their life was one of indignity and humiliation.

(97) Say: 'Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel[100] (should know that) he revealed this (Qur'ān) to your heart by Allah's[101] leave: it confirms the Scriptures revealed before it,[102] and is a guidance and good tiding to the men of faith.[103] (98) (And if this is the cause of their hostility to Gabriel, let them know:) Whoever is an enemy to Allah, His Angels and His Messengers and to Gabriel and Michael will surely find Allah an enemy to such unbelievers.'

قُلْ مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُۥ
نَزَّلَهُۥ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا
لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾ مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّلَّهِ
وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَجِبْرِيلَ
وَمِيكَىٰلَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ
لِّلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

100. The Jews not only reviled the Prophet (peace be on him) and his followers but also God's chosen angel, Gabriel, denouncing him as their enemy, and branding him as the angel of curse rather than of blessing.

101. Since Gabriel communicated the revealed messages with God's approval the abuses of the Jews which were apparently aimed at Gabriel should be considered as directed at God.

102. They abused Gabriel because he had brought the Qur'ān from God, and since the Qur'ān on the whole confirms the Torah this too became a co-sharer in those abuses.

103. Here there is a subtle suggestion that the wrath of the Jews was, in fact, directed against true guidance and righteousness even though acceptance of these would have brought them good tidings as to their own success.

(99) And We sent down to you clear verses that elucidate the Truth, and which only the transgressors deny. (100) Is it not that every time they made a covenant with Allah a party of them set it aside? The truth is that most of them do not truly believe. (101) And when there came to them a Messenger from Allah, confirming what they already possessed, a party of those who had been given the Scriptures flung the Book of Allah behind their backs as if they knew nothing, (102) and then followed what the evil ones falsely attributed to the Kingdom of Solomon[104] even though Solomon had never disbelieved;

وَلَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ءَايَٰتٍۭ بَيِّنَٰتٍ ۖ
وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَآ إِلَّا ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾
أَوَكُلَّمَا عَٰهَدُوا۟ عَهْدًا نَّبَذَهُۥ
فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُم ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ
لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَلَمَّا جَآءَهُمْ
رَسُولٌ مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا
مَعَهُمْ نَبَذَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ كِتَٰبَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَآءَ
ظُهُورِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾
وَٱتَّبَعُوا۟ مَا تَتْلُوا۟ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ
سُلَيْمَٰنَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَٰنُ

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104. 'Evil ones' embraces all evil beings, whether they belong to the human species or to the *jinn*. Here the reference seems to be to both.

When moral and material decline set in among the Israelites, they were overwhelmed with slavery and ignorance, with misery and poverty, and with humiliation and decadence. They were thus drained of all high ambitions and increasingly turned to magic, sorcery, witchcraft, charms and amulets. They began to search for facile means such as spells that would spare them hard work and yet ensure the achievement of their desired ends. At this stage they were misled by the evil ones, who made them believe that the mighty kingdom and astonishing power of Solomon were merely due to occult sciences and magical formulae, and that by revealing those they would pass on to them the keys to success. People were so engrossed in such practices that they ignored both the Book of God and anyone who summoned them to truth and righteousness.

it is the evil ones who had disbelieved, teaching people magic. And they followed what had been revealed to the two angels in Babylon – Hārūt and Mārūt – although these two (angels) never taught it to anyone without first declaring: 'We are merely a means of testing people; so, do not disbelieve.'[105] And yet they learned from them what might cause division between a man and his wife.[106] ►

وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينَ كَفَرُوا۟
يُعَلِّمُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ ٱلسِّحْرَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ
عَلَى ٱلْمَلَكَيْنِ بِبَابِلَ هَٰرُوتَ
وَمَٰرُوتَ ۚ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ
يَقُولَآ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۖ
فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ
بِهِۦ بَيْنَ ٱلْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِۦ ۚ

105. There are various opinions on the interpretation of this verse. My own conclusion is that at the time when the whole Israelite nation was chained in slavery and captivity in Babylonia God sent two angels in human form in order to test the Jews. In the same way as angels were sent to the people of Lot in the form of handsome youths (see Qur'ān 11: 69 ff. – Ed.), they were presumably sent to Israel in the form of divines who could work magic and sorcery. These angels at once began working their magical wonders but they warned the people that their presence among them was designed to test their faith, and that they ought not to jeopardize their After-life by the practice of magic. Despite the warning it seems that the Israelites had become so fond of their magical artifices that they continued to resort to talismans and sorcery.

It should not surprise anyone that angels came down to earth in human form; angels are dutiful servants of God's kingdom, and are capable of assuming the form appropriate to the specific task they are required to perform at any particular time. Who knows how many angels may be busy performing their duties in our midst even today!

One might also wonder why angels should teach people magic, which is after all intrinsically evil. In order to understand this we must remember that the nature of their task was no different from that of an undercover policeman who hands over marked currency notes to a corrupt official as a bribe with the aim of ensuring that he is caught red-handed.

106. This shows that the greatest demand was for magical arts and charms to sow discord between a man and his wife and to procure the eventual seduction of the latter. This was the depth of moral depravity to which these people had fallen. A people cannot sink to a lower level of

► *Translation continued on next page.*

They could not cause harm to anyone except by the leave of Allah, and yet they learned what harmed rather than profited them, knowing well that he who went for it will have no share in the World to Come. Evil indeed is what they sold themselves for – had they but known! (103) Had they believed and been God-fearing Allah's reward would have been better! Had they but known!

وَمَا هُم بِضَآرِّينَ بِهِۦ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنفَعُهُمْ ۚ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا۟ لَمَنِ ٱشْتَرَىٰهُ مَا لَهُۥ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَٰقٍ ۚ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱتَّقَوْا۟ لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ ۖ لَّوْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

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moral degeneracy than when adulterous affairs become their favourite pastime, and when seducing a married woman is considered a boastful achievement. The matrimonial relationship is, in truth, the very foundation of man's collective life. The soundness of human civilization depends on the soundness of the relationship between the two sexes. Hence, nothing could be worse than the person who strikes at the very foundations of the structure which supports both him and society as a whole.

There is a Tradition from the Prophet to the effect that Satan sends his agents on their missions to all parts of the world. On their return these agents report their achievements with each mentioning his own special evil act. But Satan is not completely satisfied with any of them. It is only when an agent reports that he has succeeded in separating a wife from her husband that Satan is filled with joy and embraces him. (Bukhārī, 'Ṭalāq', 25 – Ed.) In the light of this Tradition it is understandable why the angels who were sent to the Israelites to test them were asked to disclose those magical arts which would lead to separation between a husband and his wife, for the inclination of a people to learn such arts is a sure index of its moral decadence.

(104) O you who believe![107] Do not say (to the Prophet): *'Rā'inā'*, ('Lend ear to us') but say *'Unẓurnā'* ('Favour us with your attention') and pay heed to him.[108] A painful chastisement awaits the unbelievers. (105) The unbelievers, be they the People of the Book or those who associate others with Allah in His divinity, do not wish that any good should be sent down upon you from your Lord. But Allah chooses for His mercy whomsoever He wills, and Allah is of Abounding Bounty.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَقُولُوا۟
رَٰعِنَا وَقُولُوا۟ ٱنظُرْنَا وَٱسْمَعُوا۟ۗ
وَلِلْكَٰفِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
﴿١٠٤﴾ مَّا يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْ
أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَلَا ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ أَن
يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ مِّن
رَّبِّكُمْۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِۦ
مَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ
ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٠٥﴾

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107. This and the following verses inform the followers of the Prophet (peace be on him) of the machinations of the Jews against Islam and the Muslims, and dispel any doubts and misgivings they tried to create in their minds. Special attention is paid to the points raised during controversial discussions between Muslims and Jews. It is useful to note here that when the Prophet (peace be on him) arrived in Madina and the message of Islam began to spread the Jews tried to engage Muslims in controversial religious discussions. They raised all kinds of involved and suspicion-provoking problems so as to contaminate the simple and pure-hearted Muslims with the spiritual diseases from which they themselves suffered. Not only that, they resorted to sly and deceptive talk in the presence of the Prophet.

108. When the Jews visited the Prophet they tried to vent their spite by using ambiguous expressions in their greetings and conversation. They used words which had double meanings, one innocent and the other offensive. After using quite proper expressions they would then whisper some malicious words. Ostensibly they maintained the decorum of respect and courtesy while sparing no underhand means to insult the Prophet. Later we shall encounter several examples of this kind of behaviour. The particular expression referred to here, and which the Muslims were asked to avoid using since it lent itself to abuse, was employed by the Jews when in conversation with the Prophet, whenever they wanted to request a short

(106) And for whatever verse We might abrogate or consign to oblivion, We bring a better one or the like of it.[109] Are you not aware that Allah is All-Powerful? (107) Are you not aware that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belong to Allah, and that none besides Allah is your protector or helper?

۞ مَا نَنسَخْ مِنْ ءَايَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَآ أَوْ مِثْلِهَآ ۗ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُۥ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَمَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مِن وَلِىٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

pause in which to finish whatever they wanted to say. They used the expression *râ'inā*, which meant 'kindly indulge us' or 'kindly lend ear to us'.

It was possible, however, for the expression to be used with quite a different shade of meaning. In Hebrew, for instance, there is a word similar to it which means: 'Listen, may you become deaf.' In the same language it also means arrogant, ignorant and fool. In actual conversation it was also used on occasions when one wanted to say: 'If you listen to me, I will listen to you.' When it was pronounced with a slight twist of the tongue it turned into *rā'inā*, meaning 'our shepherd'.

It is because of the possibility of the word being used in these different senses that Muslims were asked to avoid it and to use instead the straightforward expression *unẓurnā*, meaning 'kindly favour us with your attention' or 'kindly grant us a while to follow (what you are saying)'. This advice was followed by the admonition to listen attentively to what the Prophet said, for the Jews used to ask for the same thing to be repeated merely because they did not pay proper attention to what the Prophet said but instead were engrossed in their own thoughts. If the Muslims were to heed what the Prophet said, they would scarcely need to make such requests.

109. This is in response to a doubt which the Jews tried to implant in the minds of the Muslims. If both the earlier Scriptures and the Qur'ān were revelations from God, why was it – they asked – that the injunctions found in the earlier Scriptures had been replaced by new ones in the Qur'ān? How could the same God issue divergent injunctions? Furthermore, they expressed their amazement at the Qur'ānic indictment of the Jews and Christians for having allowed part of the revelation to be forgotten and lost, pointing out that it was impossible that Divine revelation should be erased from human memory.

(108) Or would you ask your Messenger in the manner Moses[110] was asked before? And whoever exchanges faith for unbelief has surely strayed from the right way. ►

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَن تَسْـَٔلُوا۟ رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِن قَبْلُ ۗ وَمَن يَتَبَدَّلِ ٱلْكُفْرَ بِٱلْإِيمَـٰنِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَآءَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

In all this, their motive was not to know the truth but to cast doubt on the Divine origin of the Qur'ān. In refutation God states that He being the Absolute Sovereign has unlimited authority both to abrogate previous injunctions and to cause people to forget the injunctions He wants them to forget. However, God ensures that whatever He abrogates or causes to be erased from people's memories is replaced by something equally or even more beneficial.

110. The Jews, who were addicted to hair-splitting arguments, instigated the Muslims to ask the Prophet a great many questions. God, therefore, cautioned the Muslims against following the example of the Jews in this matter, and admonished them against unnecessary inquisitiveness. The Prophet himself often warned the Muslims that excessive inquisitiveness (which was devoid of religious earnestness and the sincere desire to do God's will) had been the ruin of earlier religious communities. (Muslim, 'Faḍā'il', 130; Bukhārī, 'I'tiṣām', 2 – Ed.) He stressed that people need not delve too deeply into questions left unelucidated by God or His Messenger. It was better to follow the injunctions which were clearly laid down, abstain from things prohibited, and avoid excessive inquiry about far-fetched, hypothetical issues, attending instead to questions of practical significance. (See the statement made by the Prophet (peace be on him):

إنّ الله افترض عليكم فرائض فلا تضيعوها، وحدّ لكم حدوداً فلا تعتدوها، ونهاكم عن أشياء فلا تنتهكوها، وسكت عن أشياء من غير نسيان فلا تكلفوها رحمة من ربكم فاقبلوها

'Alī b. 'Umar al-Dāra Quṭnī, *Sunan*, 4 vols., Beirut, 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d., see vol. 4, p. 298 in 'al-Ṣayd wa al-Ḍabā'iḥ wa al-Aṭ'imah' – Ed.)

► *Translation continued on next page.*

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ
لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ إِيمَٰنِكُمْ
كُفَّارًا حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِندِ أَنفُسِهِم مِّنۢ
بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۖ فَٱعْفُوا۟
وَٱصْفَحُوا۟ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِىَ ٱللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِۦٓ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾ وَأَقِيمُوا۟
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُوا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ ۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا۟
لِأَنفُسِكُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٠﴾
وَقَالُوا۟ لَن يَدْخُلَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَن كَانَ
هُودًا أَوْ نَصَٰرَىٰ ۗ تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ ۗ
قُلْ هَاتُوا۟ بُرْهَٰنَكُمْ إِن
كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

(109) Out of sheer envy many People of the Book would be glad to turn you back into unbelievers after you have become believers even though the Truth has become clear to them. Nevertheless, forgive and be indulgent[111] towards them until Allah brings forth His decision. Indeed Allah is All-Powerful. (110) Establish Prayer and dispense the Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*). Whatever good deeds you send ahead for your own good, you will find them with Allah. Surely Allah sees all that you do.

(111) And they say: 'None shall enter the Garden unless he be a Jew' or (according to the Christians), 'a Christian'. These are their vain desires.[112] Say: 'Bring your proof if you are speaking the truth.' ►

111. This means that one should neither allow oneself to get angry at their spite and hostility, nor waste one's valuable time by engaging in useless debates and acrimonious polemics. It is better to wait patiently and observe how God deals with them. Instead of wasting energy in frivolous pursuits such as those mentioned above one should spend it in the remembrance of God and in acts of goodness, for it is these rather than barren controversies that will benefit man in the Life to Come.

112. That is, all this is merely wishful thinking, even though they express these thoughts as if they were really going to happen.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(112) (None has any special claim upon reward from Allah.) Whoever submits himself completely to the obedience of Allah and does good will find his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

(113) The Jews say: 'The Christians have no basis for their beliefs', and the Christians say: 'The Jews have no basis for their beliefs.' They say so even though they read the Scriptures. The claim of those who have no knowledge (of the Scriptures) is similar.[113] Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences.

(114) And who is more unjust than he who bars Allah's places of worship, that His name be mentioned there, and seeks their destruction? It does not behove such people to enter them, and should they enter, they should enter in fear.[114] There is degradation for them in this world and mighty chastisement in the Next.

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُۥٓ أَجْرُهُۥ عِندَ رَبِّهِۦ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾ وَقَالَتِ ٱلْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ وَقَالَتِ ٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ لَيْسَتِ ٱلْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ ۚ فَٱللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا۟ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسَٰجِدَ ٱللَّهِ أَن يُذْكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسْمُهُۥ وَسَعَىٰ فِى خَرَابِهَآ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَن يَدْخُلُوهَآ إِلَّا خَآئِفِينَ ۚ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا خِزْىٌ وَلَهُمْ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١١٤﴾

113. The reference is to the polytheists of Arabia.

114. Places of worship should properly remain in the custody of devout and God-fearing people, so that even if bad people did go there they would

(115) The East and the West belong to Allah. To whichever direction you turn, you will be turning to Allah's.[115] Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.[116]

(116) They say: 'Allah has taken to Himself a son.' Glory to Him. In truth, His is all that is in the heavens and the earth, and to Him are all in obeisance. (117) He is the Originator of the heavens and earth; whenever He decrees a matter He (merely) says, 'Be', and it is.

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَشْرِقُ وَٱلْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا۟ فَثَمَّ
وَجْهُ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ
﴿١١٥﴾ وَقَالُوا۟ ٱتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَدًا
سُبْحَٰنَهُۥ بَل لَّهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ كُلٌّ لَّهُۥ قَٰنِتُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾ بَدِيعُ
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمْرًا
فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿١١٧﴾

be deterred from committing misdeeds through fear of punishment. This is a subtle reference to the wrong perpetrated by the unbelievers of Makka, who had barred their own compatriots – the Muslims – from worshipping in the House of God.

115. God is neither eastern nor western. East and west, north and south, and indeed all places and directions are His, though He is not confined to any particular place or direction. Hence, if any place or direction is fixed for worship this does not mean that God dwells there. Likewise, changes in the direction of Prayer is not a proper subject for controversy and dispute.

116. That is, God is neither limited, mean, narrow-minded, nor poor in resources. All such notions about God, which arise from considering Him as essentially similar to human beings, are erroneous. God's realm is boundless and so is His vision and the range of His benevolence and mercy. Moreover, God's knowledge is all-embracing. He knows who remembers Him, as well as where, when and why he does that.

(118) The ignorant say: 'Why does Allah not speak to us? Why does no sign come to us?'[117] The same was said by people before them. Their hearts are all alike.[118] We have made the signs clear for people of firm faith.[119] (119) (What greater sign can there be than that) We sent you with the Truth as a bearer of good tidings and a warner![120] And you will not be answerable about the people of the Blazing Flame!

وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا
يُكَلِّمُنَا ٱللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَآ ءَايَةٌ ۗ
كَذَٰلِكَ قَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِم
مِّثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ ۘ تَشَٰبَهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ
قَدْ بَيَّنَّا ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ
﴿١١٨﴾ إِنَّآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا
وَنَذِيرًا ۖ وَلَا تُسْـَٔلُ عَنْ أَصْحَٰبِ
ٱلْجَحِيمِ ﴿١١٩﴾

117. What they meant was that God should either appear before them Himself, tell them plainly that the Qur'ān was a revelation from Him, and proclaim His injunctions, or cause them to see some extraordinary sign that would convince them that whatever Muḥammad (peace be on him) told them was from Him.

118. The fact is that the misguided people of the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān did not raise any objection or make any demands essentially different from those of the misguided people of the past. From the remote past till today, error and misguidedness seem to have the same character, so the same doubts and objections are repeated over and over again.

119. The demand that God should speak to them directly was too absurd even to be answered. The question dealt with here concerns the demand for a sign that would convince them of the Truth. In response to this it is pointed out that many signs do exist, but all such signs are of profit only to those who are inclined to believe. As for those who are bent on disbelief, what sign can be shown to them, and to what avail?

120. Why speak of other signs when the most conspicuous sign of Truth is the very person of Muḥammad? Let us recall his life before the commencement of his prophethood, the conditions existing in the area where, and the people among whom, he was born, the manner in which he was brought up and spent the first forty years of his life, and then his glorious achievements as a Prophet. What further signs could we want in support of his message?

(120) Never will the Jews be pleased with you (O Prophet), nor the Christians until you follow their way.[121] Say: 'Allah's guidance, that is the true guidance.' Should you follow their desires disregarding the knowledge which has come to you, you shall have no protector or helper against Allah. (121) Those to whom We have given the Scripture, and who recite it as it ought to be recited, truly believe in it;[122] and those who disbelieve in it, they are the utter losers.

وَلَن تَرْضَىٰ عَنكَ ٱلْيَهُودُ وَلَا ٱلنَّصَٰرَىٰ
حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ هُوَ
ٱلْهُدَىٰ ۗ وَلَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَآءَهُم بَعْدَ
ٱلَّذِى جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ ۙ مَا لَكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مِن
وَلِىٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٢٠﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمُ
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يَتْلُونَهُۥ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِۦٓ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِۦ ۗ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِهِۦ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ
ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

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121. The cause of their disconcertment with the Prophet (peace be on him) was not that they were earnest seekers after the Truth which the Prophet had failed to make clear to them. The real cause of their unhappiness was that he had not resorted to hypocrisy and trickery in regard to religious matters, that unlike them he did not pursue self-interest and self-indulgence under the façade of godliness and piety, that he did not twist religious principles and injunctions without scruple, as the Jews were wont to do in order to make them suit their desires and fancies, that he did not resort to the chicanery and duplicity which characterized the religious life of the Jews. As a result, it was no use trying to appease them. For unless the Muslims were prepared to assume the attitude and orientation of the Jews and to follow all their errors in belief and practice, there was no question of their being able to bring about any reconciliation with them.

122. This refers to the pious element among the People of the Book. Since these people read the Book with sincerity and honesty of purpose, they are inclined to accept whatever they find to be true according to it.

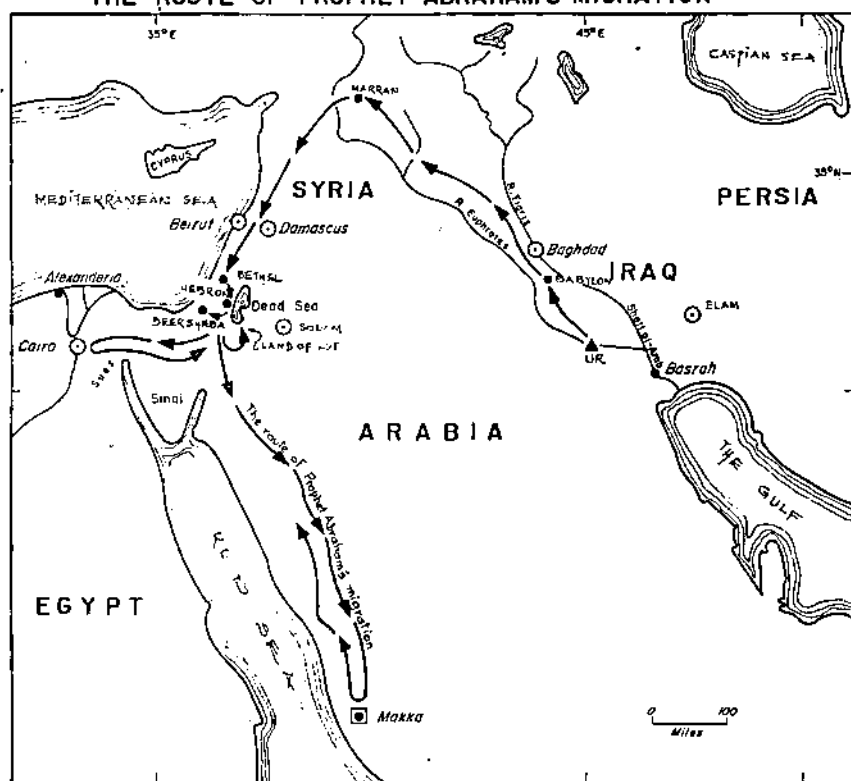
(122) Children of Israel![123] Recall My favour which I bestowed upon you and that I exalted you above the nations of the world, (123) and have fear of the Day when none shall avail another, when ransom shall be accepted from no one, when no one's intercession will profit them, when there shall be no help from any quarter.

يَٰبَنِيٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتِيَ ٱلَّتِيٓ
أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى
ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٢٢﴾ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ يَوْمًا لَّا تَجْزِى
نَفْسٌ عَن نَّفْسٍ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ
وَلَا تَنفَعُهَا شَفَٰعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

123. A fresh subject is now broached. In order to appreciate it fully, the following should be clearly borne in mind:

(1) After Noah, Abraham was the first Prophet appointed by God to spread the universal message of Islam. At the outset, he journeyed for many years from Iraq to Egypt, and from Syria and Palestine to various parts of Arabia inviting people to serve and obey God. Later he appointed deputies in various regions to carry on his mission. He sent his nephew Lot to Transjordan, his son Isaac to Syria and Palestine, and his eldest son Ishmael to Arabia. Then he built, in Makka, the shrine called the Ka'bah which subsequently, and under God's own command, was made the centre of the prophetic mission.

(2) Abraham's progeny descended in two main branches. One of these, the Children of Ishmael, lived in Arabia. The Quraysh and other Arabian tribes belonged to this branch of Abraham's line. Even those Arabian tribes which were not related to him by blood identified themselves with Abraham, since they had been influenced in varying degrees by his religious ideas. The other branch consisted of the Children of Isaac. In this branch there arose a great number of Prophets, for example Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, John, and Jesus. Since Jacob was called Israel, his offspring came to be known as the Children of Israel. Other peoples who accepted their faith as a result of preaching either lost their former identity and became assimilated with them, or remained separate from them ethnically but identified with them religiously. At the time when decadence flourished this branch of the Abrahamic family gave birth first to Judaism, and subsequently to Christianity.*

*This is based on the ground that originally all Prophets propounded Islam, and that Judaism and Christianity are only later innovations, and in fact, distortions – Ed.

The Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) was born in Ur, a town in Iraq. After his trial of the Fire, he left his home and migrated first to Harran. Later on, he went to Palestine and set up the centres of Da'wah (the call) at Bethel, Hebron and Bai'r Sheba. He deputed the Prophet Lot (peace be on him), his nephew, to the eastern part of the Dead Sea. Then he travelled to Egypt, a centre of culture and civilization of the day, next only to Iraq in its splendour. It is not, however, definitely known whether he established any centre of Da'wah in Egypt. Next, he moved to Hijaz and built the House of Allah in Makka. He entrusted the House to his son, the Prophet Ishmael (peace be on him). Finally he settled in the Palestinian city of Hebron. After his death, the Prophet Isaac (peace be on him), his second son, succeeded him in the work of Da'wah, a legacy which was afterwards inherited by the Prophet Jacob (peace be on him).

(3) The true mission of Abraham was to invite people to obey God and to mould the entire system of individual and collective life according to Divine Guidance. He was himself obedient to God and followed the teaching received from Him, and constantly strove to spread it and make all human beings live in obedience to it. It was because of this that he was appointed the religious leader and guide of the whole world. After his death, the task of guiding the world was entrusted to the branch which had issued from Isaac and Jacob, and which came to be known as the Children of Israel. It is in this branch that many Prophets were born. It was also this branch which was given the knowledge of the Straight Way, and was designated to lead all the nations of the world along that Way. It is of this favour that God again and again reminds these people.

In the time of Solomon this branch took Jerusalem as the centre of its mission. Jerusalem maintained its central position for all devotees of God and remained the *qiblah* (direction) in which all worshippers of God were required to turn in their Prayer.

(4) While addressing the Children of Israel in the last ten sections, God set forth the criminal record of the Jews, exposed their decadent state at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān, and made it clear to them that they had totally lacked gratitude to God for His favours and bounties. Not only had they ceased to guide the world, but had turned away from Truth and righteousness to such an extent that nearly all of them had lost the capacity to do good and to respond to Truth.

(5) It is also intimated that the religious leadership of all mankind is not an exclusive privilege of Abrahamic blood, but rather the fruit of Abraham's sincere obedience and service to God, to which he had wholly consecrated himself. Only those who follow the way of Abraham, and guide the world along that way, are therefore entitled to the position of guidance and leadership. And since the Jews had abandoned it and become incapable of carrying out the mission of Abraham they were being removed from that position.

(6) At the same time it is hinted that the non-Israelite peoples who identified themselves with Abraham through Moses and Jesus had also veered from the way of Abraham. The same was true of the polytheists of Arabia, who felt proud of belonging to Abraham and Ishmael and based this pride on lineage alone. For, so far as their faith and conduct were concerned, they had not even the remotest tie with Abraham and Ishmael. They did not deserve, therefore, to be entrusted with the religious leadership of the world.

(7) It is also made clear that by God's will a Prophet, for whose advent Abraham and Ishmael had once prayed, was born in the other branch of the Abrahamic family, i.e. the Ishmaelites. The way propounded by this Prophet is exactly the same as that by Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob and in fact all the Messengers. His followers also confirm the truth of all those designated in the past to serve as God's Messengers, and call mankind to the same message those Messengers preached earlier. Thus, leadership now naturally devolves on those who follow this Prophet.

(8) This proclamation of a transfer of leadership naturally called for the proclamation of a change in the direction of Prayer. As long as the Israelites held the reins of the world's religious leadership, Jerusalem remained the centre of the mission of Islam and the *qiblah* of truth-loving people. The Arabian Prophet (peace be on him) as well as his followers had accepted Jerusalem as the *qiblah* until God duly proclaimed the removal of the Jews from their position of leadership. With this proclamation Jerusalem ceased to enjoy its central position. So it was proclaimed that from then on the centre of God's true religion would be the place from which the message of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) had radiated. Since in the past it had been the centre of the mission of Abraham (peace be on him), it was difficult even for the polytheists and for the People of the Book to deny that the Ka'bah had a greater right to be made the *qiblah*. There was thus every reasonable ground for the decision to change the *qiblah* and its opponents could only object out of irrational adamance.

(9) The proclamation that the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) had been designated to the religious leadership of mankind, and that the Ka'bah would now be the focal point of man's religious life, was followed by directives (beginning with verse 153 and continuing to the end of the *sūrah*) addressed to the Muslims. These directives were aimed at enabling the Muslims to acquit themselves creditably of the duties laid upon their shoulders as the bearers of this mission.

(124) Recall when Abraham's Lord tested him in certain matters[124] and when he successfully stood the test He said: 'Indeed I am going to appoint you a leader of all people.' When Abraham asked: 'And is this covenant also for my descendants?', the Lord responded: 'My covenant does not embrace the wrong-doers.'[125]

(125) And We made this House (Ka'bah) a resort for mankind and a place of security, commanding people: 'Take the station of Abraham as a permanent place for Prayer', and enjoined Abraham and Ishmael: 'Purify My House for those who walk around it, and those who abide in devotion, and those who bow, and who prostrate themselves (in Prayer).'[126]

۞ وَإِذِ ٱبْتَلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ رَبُّهُۥ بِكَلِمَـٰتٍ
فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّى جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ
قَالَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِى ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِى
ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا ٱلْبَيْتَ
مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا وَٱتَّخِذُوا۟ مِن مَّقَامِ
إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ مُصَلًّى ۖ وَعَهِدْنَآ إِلَىٰٓ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ
وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِىَ لِلطَّآئِفِينَ
وَٱلْعَـٰكِفِينَ وَٱلرُّكَّعِ ٱلسُّجُودِ ﴿١٢٥﴾

124. At various places the Qur'ān enumerates the severe tests through which Abraham passed. It was only after these had been completed successfully that he was able to establish his worthiness to serve as the religious guide and leader of all mankind. From the moment when the truth was revealed to him till the moment he died, his life was a continuous tale of sacrifice and suffering for his cause. There is no conceivable object of man's love and attachment in the world which Abraham did not sacrifice for the sake of the truth. Likewise, there is no conceivable danger which instinctively frightens man which Abraham did not encounter for the sake of the Truth.

125. This specifies that God's promise of the conferment of leadership applied only to those of Abraham's offspring who were righteous, and that the wrong-doers were naturally excluded. This also makes it clear that,

(126) And when Abraham prayed: 'O my Lord! Make this a place of security and provide such of its people who believe in Allah and the Last Day with fruits for sustenance', Allah answered, 'And I shall still provide him who disbelieves with the wherewithal for this short life,[127] and then I shall drive him to the chastisement of the Fire; that is an evil end.'

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّ ٱجْعَلْ هَـٰذَا بَلَدًا
ءَامِنًا وَٱرْزُقْ أَهْلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
مِنْهُم بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ ۖ قَالَ وَمَن كَفَرَ
فَأُمَتِّعُهُۥ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُۥٓ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ
ٱلنَّارِ ۖ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٢٦﴾

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just as the promise did not apply to the misguided Israelites, it did not apply to the polytheistic Ishmaelites.

126. 'Purify My House' does not merely mean keeping it clean of dirt and filth. The real purity and cleanliness of the House of God rests in the fact that in it the name of God alone should be glorified. If someone declares in its sacred precincts that anything other than God is his Lord, his object of worship and adoration, the dispenser of man's needs and requirements, the hearer of man's supplications, then such a person is guilty of desecrating the House of God.

This verse also contains a hint as to the evil-doing of the people of the Quraysh. They boasted that they were the inheritors of the legacy of Abraham and Ishmael, but instead of being faithful to that legacy, they actually trampled over it. So, just as the Children of Israel were excluded from the promise made to Abraham, so were the polytheistic children of Ishmael. (See also n. 125 above – Ed.)

127. (Here a distinction is made between honouring a people by entrusting it with the religious leadership and guidance of the world, and bestowing on it an abundant means of livelihood – Ed.) When Abraham enquired who merited world leadership it was made clear to him that only his truly believing and righteous children, to the exclusion of the wrong-doing ones, were worthy of it. This occasioned God to clarify that the religious leadership of the world was quite distinct from its livelihood. Men of faith alone were entitled to the former, whereas both believers and unbelievers would be provided the latter. If someone enjoys abundant material wealth it should not be misconstrued to mean that God is necessarily pleased with him and that he has been designated by God to provide religious guidance to the world.

(127) Recall when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House, praying: 'Our Lord! Accept this from us; You are All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (128) Our Lord! Make us submissive to You and make out of our descendants a community that submits itself to You, and show us the ways of Your worship, and turn to us in mercy. You are Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate. (129) Our Lord! Raise up in the midst of our offspring a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your verses, and instruct them in the Book and in Wisdom, and purify their lives.[128] Verily, You are Mighty, Wise.'[129]

(130) And who, unless he be weak of mind, would be averse to the way of Abraham? For it is We Who chose Abraham for Our mission in this world, and surely in the World to Come he shall be reckoned among the righteous. ►

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ ٱلْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ ٱلْبَيْتِ
وَإِسْمَٰعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ
ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٢٧﴾ رَبَّنَا وَٱجْعَلْنَا
مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَآ أُمَّةً
مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَآ ۖ
إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلتَّوَّابُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٢٨﴾ رَبَّنَا
وَٱبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ
ءَايَٰتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ
ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٢٩﴾ وَمَن يَرْغَبُ عَن مِّلَّةِ
إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ إِلَّا مَن سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُۥ ۚ وَلَقَدِ
ٱصْطَفَيْنَٰهُ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ فِى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ
لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

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128. The term 'purification' used here embraces the purification of beliefs and outlook, morals, habits and customs, and social, cultural and political life; the purification of man's life in its totality.

129. This has been said in order to indicate that the advent of Muḥammad (peace be on him) was in fact God's response to the prayer of Abraham (peace be on him).

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(131) Such was Abraham that when his Lord said to him: 'Submit',[130] he said: 'I have submitted to the Lord of the Universe.' (132) And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, and so did Jacob:[131] 'My children! Behold, Allah has chosen this religion for you.[132] Remain till death in submission (to Allah).' (133) Why, were you witnesses when death came to Jacob? He asked his children: 'Whom will you serve after me?' They said: 'We shall serve your God, the God of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the One God, and unto Him do we submit.'[133]

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥٓ أَسْلِمْ ۖ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ
لِرَبِّ ٱلْعَـٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾ وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَآ
إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَـٰبَنِىَّ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
ٱصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ ٱلدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا
وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾ أَمْ كُنتُمْ شُهَدَآءَ
إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ
لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنۢ بَعْدِى قَالُوا۟
نَعْبُدُ إِلَـٰهَكَ وَإِلَـٰهَ ءَابَآئِكَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ
وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَـٰقَ إِلَـٰهًا وَٰحِدًا
وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

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130. 'Muslim' signifies he who bows in obedience to God, who acknowledges God alone as his Sovereign, Lord and Master, and the only object of worship, devotion and service, who unreservedly surrenders himself to God and undertakes to live his life in accordance with the guidance that has come down from Him. Islam is the appellation which characterizes the above-mentioned belief and outlook which constitutes the core and kernel of the religion of all the Prophets who have appeared from time to time among different peoples and in different countries since the very beginning of human life.

131. Jacob is especially mentioned since the Children of Israel were his direct descendants.

132. *Dīn* is a Qur'ānic technical term, signifying the way of life, the system of conduct, and the code on which man bases his entire mode of thought and action. (For the author's views on *dīn* see his *Four Basic Qur'ānic Terms*, tr. Abu Asad, Lahore, 1979, pp. 93–103 – Ed.)

(134) Now, they were a people who passed away. Theirs is what they have earned, and yours is what you have earned. You shall not be asked concerning what they did.[134]

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُم مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْـَٔلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

133. In the Bible the events connected with the death of Jacob (peace be on him) are narrated in detail. It is amazing that this narrative makes no reference to his testament. However, the contents of the detailed testament embodied in the Talmud greatly resemble the Qur'ānic version. The Talmudic version reads as follows:

> 'Serve the Lord your God, and He will deliver ye from all trouble, even as He delivered your fathers.'
>
> '. . . Teach your children to love God, and observe His commandments, in order that their days may be prolonged, for God will guard those who do justly and walk in righteousness through all His ways.'
>
> And the sons of Jacob responded, 'All that you have commanded us, our father, we will do. May God be with us!'
>
> And Jacob answered: 'The Lord will be with you if ye depart not from His ways to the right hand or to the left.'

(*The Talmud Selections* by H. Polano, London, Frederick Warne & Co., [1877], pp. 113–14.)

134. What is being said here is that even though they might be their offspring in terms of blood-relationship they had, in fact, no true relationship with them. What right did they have to pretend to belong to them when they had departed far from their way? For God would not ask people what their forefathers did; it was rather about their own conduct and action that they would be questioned.

'Theirs is what they have earned' is a characteristically Qur'ānic expression. What we ordinarily characterize as either 'action' or 'doing' is termed by the Qur'ān as 'earning'. The reason is that each and every human action has its ultimate effect, whether or not it is good, and will have its manifestation in God's approval or disapproval. It is this ultimate effect which is a man's earning. Since the Qur'ān considers this to be of paramount importance, it characterizes man's actions as his 'earning'.

(135) And they say: 'Be Jews', or 'Be Christians'. 'Then you will be rightly guided.' Say to them: 'No, follow exclusively the way of Abraham who was not one of those who associate others with Allah in His divinity.'[135] (136) Say: 'We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the descendants (of Jacob) and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and in what the other Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them,[136] and we are those who submit to Allah.'

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَىٰ
تَهْتَدُوا ۗ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۖ
وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾ قُولُوا
آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ
إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ
وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ
وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ
لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

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135. In order to grasp the subtlety of this remark two things should be borne in mind.

First, that in comparison to Islam, the primordial religion, both Judaism and Christianity are later products. The name Judaism, as well as the characteristic features and elaborate body of laws and regulations associated with it, emerged during the third or fourth century B.C. As for Christianity, in the sense of the body of dogmas and theological doctrines which characterize it, it came into existence long after Jesus (peace be on him). The question that naturally arises is that, if man's guidance depends on following Judaism or Christianity how can Abraham and other Prophets and righteous people who are accepted as having been rightly-guided even by the Jews and Christians be considered so when they were born several centuries before the birth of Judaism and Christianity? If they were rightly-guided from whom did they receive their guidance? Obviously their source of guidance and inspiration was neither Judaism nor Christianity since, in their times, these did not exist. So man's rectitude does not depend on those characteristics which led to the rise of Jewish and Christian particularisms; it rather depends on adopting that universal way to Truth which has guided and inspired men throughout the ages.

(137) And then if they come to believe as you believe, they are on right guidance; and if they turn away, then quite obviously they have merely fallen into opposition to the Truth. Allah will suffice you for protection against them. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

(138) Say: "Take on Allah's colour."[137] And whose colour is better than Allah's? It is Him that we serve.

فَإِنْ ءَامَنُوا۟ بِمِثْلِ مَآ ءَامَنتُم بِهِۦ فَقَدِ
ٱهْتَدَوا۟ ۖ وَّإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِى شِقَاقٍ ۖ
فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَهُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ
ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٣٧﴾ صِبْغَةَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَنْ
أَحْسَنُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ صِبْغَةً ۖ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ
عَٰبِدُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

Second, the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians attest that Abraham believed that worship, adoration, service and obedience were due to God alone, and that it was his mission to have none associated with God in His attributes and rights. Since polytheistic elements had made inroads into Judaism and Christianity it was obvious that both had strayed from the way of Abraham.

136. To make no distinction between the Prophets means not to hold some of them to be right and the others to be wrong, not to recognize some to have been the recipients of Divine revelation and the others not. All the Prophets sent by God invited men to the same Truth and to the same way. Hence for anyone who is really a lover of Truth it is necessary that he should recognize all of them to be its bearers. Those who believe in one particular Prophet and disbelieve in others do not in fact believe even in that particular Prophet in whom they claim to believe, for they have not grasped the nature of that universal 'Straight Way' (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) which was enunciated by Moses, Jesus and the other Prophets. When such people claim to follow a Prophet they really mean that they do so out of deference to their forefathers. Their religion in fact consists of bigoted ancestor-worship and blind imitation of inherited customs rather than sincere adherence to the directives of any Prophet of God.

(139) Say (O Prophet): 'Will you then dispute with us concerning Allah when He is our Lord and your Lord?[138] Our deeds are for us and your deeds are for you. And it is Him that we serve exclusively.'[139]

قُلْ أَتُحَاجُّونَنَا فِي ٱللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا
وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَآ أَعْمَٰلُنَا وَلَكُمْ
أَعْمَٰلُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُخْلِصُونَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

137. This verse can be translated in two ways. One of these is: 'We have taken on Allah's colour.' The other is: 'Take on Allah's colour.'

On the eve of the advent of Christianity the Jews followed the practice of bathing everyone who embraced their religion. This ritual bath signified that all his previous sins had been washed away and that he had adopted a different colour for his life. This practice was subsequently taken over by the Christians and is termed 'baptism'. Not only converts but even new-born babies were baptized. The Qur'ānic remarks here refer to this institution. The Qur'ān says in effect: 'Of what use is this formal baptism? What really is worth doing is to adopt the colour of God, and it is not water that gives one this colour but actual service and devotion to God.'

138. The one principle that the Prophet and his followers unreservedly stood for was that God alone should be served. Does that call for dispute and quarrel? If anyone, it is the Muslims who are entitled to quarrel with the Jews and Christians, for it is they rather than the Muslims who insist that others beside God should also be made objects of service and adoration.

An alternative translation of this portion could be: 'Would you then dispute with us for the sake of Allah?' In this case the meaning of the verse would be that if their dispute was sincere, it was easy to put an end to it by agreeing to serve none but God.

139. They are told that everyone is responsible for his own conduct. If they have earmarked a part of their service and devotion to others than God, let them do so and see for themselves what it leads to. The Muslims did not want to keep them from error by force. As for themselves, they had consecrated their service, obedience and worship to God alone. If the Jews and Christians could bring themselves to recognize the right of the Muslims to do so, the dispute could automatically be brought to an end.

(140) Or do you claim that Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the descendants (of Jacob) were 'Jews' or 'Christians'? Say: 'Do you have greater knowledge, or Allah?'[140] Who does more wrong than he who conceals a testimony he has received from Allah? Allah is not heedless of the things you do.[141] (141) Now, they were a people who passed away. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you earn; you shall not be questioned concerning what they did.

أَمْ تَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمَ وَإِسْمَـٰعِيلَ
وَإِسْحَـٰقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ
وَٱلْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا۟ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَـٰرَىٰ ۗ
قُلْ ءَأَنتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ
مِمَّن كَتَمَ شَهَـٰدَةً عِندَهُۥ مِنَ
ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَـٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٠﴾
تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ ۖ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ
وَلَكُم مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ ۖ وَلَا تُسْـَٔلُونَ
عَمَّا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤١﴾

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140. This remark is addressed to the ignorant mass of Jews and Christians who sincerely believed that all the Prophets belonged to their religious denomination.

141. This remark is addressed to the Jewish and Christian theologians who were not unaware that Judaism and Christianity, with their existing characteristics, had emerged at a relatively late period in history. They nevertheless considered Truth to be confined to their own religious sects. They also perpetuated the misunderstanding that man's ultimate happiness and success lay in following the beliefs, institutions and legal codes which had been developed by their jurists, theologians and mystics long after the Prophet of God had passed away. When these theologians were asked to which among their religious communities Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other Prophets belonged, they evaded a reply. This was because they could not state categorically that they belonged to their own sect. On the other hand, they could not reply explicitly in the negative, for such an admission would have undermined the very basis of their claim that Truth was confined to their fold.

(142) The weak-minded will say: 'What has turned them away from the direction they formerly observed in Prayer?'[142] Say: 'To Allah belong the East and the West; He guides whomsoever He wills onto a straight way.'[143] (143) And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way, so that you might be witnesses before all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness before you.[144]

۞ سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ
مَا وَلَّاهُمْ عَنْ قِبْلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا ۚ قُلْ
لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ ۚ يَهْدِي مَنْ
يَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٤٢﴾
وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا
لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

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142. After his migration to Madina the Prophet continued to pray in the direction of Jerusalem for between sixteen and seventeen months. Subsequently, he received the order to pray in the direction of the Ka'bah. (See verse 144 below.)

143. This is the first answer to the objections of these ignorant people. Their narrow minds and limited vision led them to undue attachment to such formalities as the direction and locale of Prayer. They presumably conceived God to be confined to a particular direction. In reply to their absurd objection the first thing which was explained was that all directions belong to God. Fixing any particular direction for Prayer does not mean that God is confined to that direction. All those who have been favoured with God's true guidance rise above such limitations of outlook so that it is easy for them to grasp the universal verities of religion. (See also nn. 115 and 116 above.)

144. This constitutes the proclamation appointing the religious community (*ummah*) consisting of the followers of Muḥammad to religious guidance and leadership of the world.

'And it is thus', which precedes this proclamation, contains two allusions. It alludes, in the first place, to that Divine Guidance which enabled the followers of Muḥammad to know the Straight Way so that they could attain progress to the point of being proclaimed 'the community of the middle way' (or 'the mid-most community' or 'the community justly balanced' – Ed.) In the second place there is an allusion to the change in the

direction of Prayer from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah. People of limited intelligence could see no significance in this change of direction although the substitution of Jerusalem by the Ka'bah amounted to the removal of the Children of Israel from their position of world leadership and their replacement by the *ummah* of Muḥammad (peace be on him).

The Arabic expression which we have translated as 'the community of the middle way' is too rich in meaning to find an adequate equivalent in any other language. It signifies that distinguished group of people which follows the path of justice and equity, of balance and moderation, a group which occupies a central position among the nations of the world so that its friendship with all is based on righteousness and justice and none receives its support in wrong and injustice.

The purpose of creating 'the community of the middle way', according to this Qur'ānic verse, is to make it stand as witness 'before all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness before you'. What this means is that when the whole of mankind is called to account, the Prophet, as God's representative, will stand witness to the fact that he had communicated to the Muslims and had put into practice the teachings postulating sound beliefs, righteous conduct and a balanced system of life which he had received from on high. The Muslims, acting on behalf of the Prophet after his return to the mercy of God, will be asked to bear the same witness before the rest of mankind and to say that they had spared no effort in either communicating to mankind what the Prophet had communicated to them, or in exemplifying in their own lives what the Prophet had, by his own conduct, translated into actual practice.

This position of standing witness before all mankind on behalf of God, which has been conferred on this community, amounts to its being invested with the leadership of all mankind. This is at once a great honour and a heavy responsibility. For what it actually means is that just as the Prophet served as a living example of godliness and moral rectitude, of equity and fair play before the Muslim community, so is the Muslim community required to stand *vis-à-vis* the whole world. What is expected of this community is that it should be able to make known, both by word and deed, the meaning of godliness and righteousness, of equity and fair play.

Furthermore, just as the Prophet had been entrusted with the heavy responsibility of conveying to the Muslims the guidance which he had received, in a like manner a heavy responsibility has been laid on the Muslims to communicate this guidance to all mankind. If the Muslims fail to establish before God that they did their duty in conveying to mankind the guidance they had received through the Prophet they will be taken to task seriously and their honourable position as the leaders of the whole world, far from being of any help to them, will spell their disaster. They will be held responsible along with the protagonists of evil for all the errors of belief and conduct which have spread during their term of leadership. They will have to face the grim question: What were they doing when the world was convulsed by storms of transgression, injustice and error?

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا ٱلْقِبْلَةَ ٱلَّتِي كُنتَ عَلَيْهَآ إِلَّا
لِنَعْلَمَ مَن يَتَّبِعُ ٱلرَّسُولَ مِمَّن يَنقَلِبُ
عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيْهِ وَإِن كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا
عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَى ٱللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ
لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَٰنَكُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِٱلنَّاسِ
لَرَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٤٣﴾ قَدْ نَرَىٰ تَقَلُّبَ
وَجْهِكَ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً
تَرْضَىٰهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ
ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ
فَوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ

We appointed the direction which you formerly observed so that We might know who follows the Messenger from him who turns on his heels.[145] For indeed it was a burdensome thing except for those whom Allah guided. And Allah will never leave your faith to waste. Allah is full of gentleness and mercy to mankind.

(144) We see you oft turning your face to the heaven; now We are turning you to the direction that will satisfy you. Turn your face towards the Holy Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it in Prayer.[146]

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145. One purpose of this change in the direction of Prayer was to find out who was blinkered by irrational prejudices and chained by chauvinistic attachment to land and blood, and who, having liberated himself from those bonds, was capable of rising to the heights and grasping the Truth.

On the one hand were the Arabs who were steeped in their national and racial arrogance. For them, taking Jerusalem as the direction of their Prayer (as originally practised by the Prophet) was too hard a blow to their national vanity to be accepted with equanimity. On the other hand, the Jews were essentially no different. They, too, were obsessed with racial pride so that it was difficult for them to accept any other than the direction of Prayer which they had inherited from the past. How could the people whose hearts were full of such idols respond to the call of the Messenger of God? Hence, God saw to it that the worshippers of such idols were distinguished from the genuine worshippers of God by first fixing Jerusalem as the direction of Prayer. This was bound to alienate all those who had worshipped the idol of Arabianism. Later, the fixing of the Ka'bah as the direction of Prayer led to the alienation of those who were engrossed in the worship of the idol of Israel. Thus there were left with the Prophet only those who truly worshipped none but the One True God.

146. This is the injunction concerning the change in the direction of Prayer and was revealed in Rajab or Sha'bān, 2 A.H. According to a

Tradition in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, the Prophet was at the house of Bishr b. Barā' b. Ma'rūr where he had been invited to a meal. When the time of *ẓuhr* prayer came, the Prophet rose to lead it. He had completed two *rak'ahs* and was in the third when this verse was suddenly revealed. Soon after the revelation of this verse everybody, following the leadership of the Prophet, turned the direction of Prayer away from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah. A public proclamation of the new order was then made throughout Madina and in the suburbs. Barā' b. 'Āzib says that at one place the announcement was heard by people while they were in the state of *rukū'* (kneeling). On hearing this order they immediately turned their faces towards the Ka'bah. Anas b. Mālik says that the news of the announcement reached Banū Salamah the next day while the morning Prayer was in progress. People had completed one *rak'ah* when they heard the announcement about the change of direction and the entire congregation immediately faced the new *qiblah*. (See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, pp. 241 f. – Ed.)

It ought to be noted that Jerusalem is to the north of Madina while the Ka'bah is to the south. In order to change direction during congregational Prayer it would have been necessary for the leader of the Prayer to walk several steps beyond what was originally the last row of worshippers. The people in the congregation, too, would have been forced not only to make a right about-turn but also to walk a little to straighten their rows. We find specific mention of this in certain Traditions.

The words, 'We see you oft turning your face to the heaven', and 'Now We are turning your face to the direction that shall satisfy you', show clearly that even before the revelation of this injunction the Prophet was expecting something of this nature. He had begun to feel, with the termination of the era of Israelite leadership, that the time had come for the central position of Jerusalem to cease and a return to the original centre of the Abrahamic mission to commence.

The 'Holy Mosque' refers to the sanctuary invested with holiness and sanctity; the sanctuary in the centre of which the Ka'bah is located.

To turn one's face in the direction of the Ka'bah does not mean that wherever a man might be he should turn to the Ka'bah with absolute accuracy. It would obviously be extremely difficult for everyone to comply with such an order. Hence the order is to turn one's face in the direction of the Ka'bah rather than to the Ka'bah itself. According to the Qur'ān, we are required to find out the direction of the Ka'bah as accurately as possible. We are not required, however, to locate it with absolute precision. We may pray in the direction which appears correct as a result of our enquiry. However, if a man is either at a place where it is difficult to determine the direction of the Ka'bah or if he is in a position where it is difficult to maintain the correct direction (e.g. when travelling on a train, a boat, or an aeroplane), he may pray in the direction which seems correct, or in whatever direction it is possible for him to face. If he then comes to know the correct direction while he is in the state of Prayer he should turn his face in that direction.

Those who have been granted the Book certainly know that this (injunction to change the direction of Prayer) is right and is from their Lord. Allah is not heedless of what they do. (145) And yet no matter what proofs you bring before the People of the Book they will not follow your direction of Prayer; nor will you follow their direction of Prayer. None is prepared to follow the other's direction of Prayer. Were you to follow their desires in disregard of the knowledge which has come to you, you will surely be reckoned among the wrong-doers.[147] ▶

وَإِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَـٰفِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾ وَلَئِنْ أَتَيْتَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ بِكُلِّ ءَايَةٍ مَّا تَبِعُوا۟ قِبْلَتَكَ ۚ وَمَآ أَنتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتَهُمْ ۚ وَمَا بَعْضُهُم بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَلَئِنِ ٱتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَآءَهُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَكَ مِنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ ۙ إِنَّكَ إِذًا لَّمِنَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

147. The purpose of this verse is to ask the Prophet not to be disturbed by the controversy and remonstrance to which some people had resorted as a result of this change in the direction of Prayer. It was difficult to convince those people by argument, since they suffered from prejudices and intransigence and were unwilling to abandon their traditional *qiblah*. It was also impossible for the matter to be resolved by adopting the *qiblah* of any of the contending groups; there were various groups and they were not agreed in respect of the *qiblah*. If the *qiblah* of one group had been adopted this would have satisfied only that group. As for the rest, their remonstrating would persist. Furthermore, and more basic in this connection, was the fact that as a Prophet Muḥammad ought neither to be concerned to please people, nor haggle with them in order to arrive at compromised solutions. On the contrary, the mission of a Prophet is to adhere firmly to the knowledge vouchsafed to him by God regardless of all opposition. To deviate from that knowledge to please others is tantamount to offending the prophetic mission and is inconsistent with the gratitude that the Prophet ought to feel for having been favoured with the position of world leadership.

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(146) Those to whom We have given the Book recognize the place* (towards which one must turn in Prayer) as well as they recognize their own sons[148] even though a group of them knowingly conceals the Truth. (147) This is a definite Truth from your Lord; be not, then, among the doubters.

(148) Everyone has a direction towards which he turns; so excel one another in good works.[149] Allah will bring you all together wherever you might be, for nothing is beyond His power.

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يَعْرِفُونَهُۥ كَمَا
يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَآءَهُمْ ۖ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِّنْهُمْ
لَيَكْتُمُونَ ٱلْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٤٦﴾
ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ
ٱلْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾ وَلِكُلٍّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيهَا ۖ
فَٱسْتَبِقُوا۟ ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ ۚ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا۟
يَأْتِ بِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ
كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٤٨﴾

148. 'To recognize something as well as one recognizes one's sons' is an Arabic idiom. It is used with regard to things which one knows without the least shadow of a doubt. The Jewish and Christian scholars were well aware that the Ka'bah had been constructed by Abraham and that Jerusalem had been built by Solomon some thirteen hundred years after that, and that in his time it was made the *qiblah*. This is an unquestionable historical fact and they knew it to be so.

149. There is a subtle gap between this sentence and the next, a gap which the reader can fill with just a little reflection. The idea conveyed here is that anyone who prays will, after all, have to turn his face in some direction. But what is of real significance is not the turning of one's face in some specific direction but one's orientation to righteousness for the sake of which one performs the ritual Prayer. A man's real concern should be moral excellence rather than controversies regarding such formal regulations as the direction of Prayer.

*According to some commentators, the pronoun refers to the Prophet or the Qur'ān, rather than the *Qiblah* – Ed.

(149) From wheresoever you might come forth turn your face towards the Holy Mosque; for that indeed is the truth from your Lord, and Allah is not heedless of what you do. (150) From wheresoever you come forth turn your faces towards the Holy Mosque, and wheresoever you may be, turn your faces towards it in Prayer so that none may have an argument against you,[150] unless they be those immersed in wrong-doing. Do not fear them, but fear only Me so that I may complete My favour upon you;[151] perhaps you will be guided to the right way[152]

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ
شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۖ وَإِنَّهُۥ لَلْحَقُّ
مِن رَّبِّكَ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ
﴿١٤٩﴾ وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ
شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ
فَوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ
لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَٱخْشَوْنِى
وَلِأُتِمَّ نِعْمَتِى عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ
تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

150. The followers of the Prophet (peace be on him) were asked to follow the order to turn their face towards the Ka'bah, and to do so strictly, since any lapse in this matter on their part would give their opponents a weapon to use against them in their polemics. They would be able to hold Muslims up to ridicule on the grounds that they had violated what they themselves claimed to be from their Lord.

151. The 'favour' here refers to the position of world leadership and guidance from which God removed the Children of Israel and which was then conferred upon this *ummah*. The highest reward that can be granted to a people in recognition of its righteousness is its designation, by God's command, to the leadership of the world in order to guide the entire human race to godliness and righteousness.

What is said here, therefore, is that the command to change the *qiblah* was a sign of the installation of the Muslims to world leadership. Hence, the Muslims should follow the directives of God if for no other reason than that ingratitude and disobedience might deprive them of the honour that had been bestowed upon them.

152. '. . . Perhaps you will be guided to the right way' is indicative here of the regal majesty appropriate for God's address to His creatures. The indication from a sovereign, while addressing his slave, that the latter could expect some favour from him is quite enough to make that slave rejoice and celebrate.

(151) just as when We sent a Messenger among you, of yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, purifies your lives, instructs you in the Book and in Wisdom, and instructs you on what you knew not. (152) So remember Me and I shall remember you; give thanks to Me and do not be ungrateful to Me for My favours.

(153) Believers![153] Seek help in patience and in Prayer; Allah is with the patient ones.[154] ▶

كَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا
مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتِنَا
وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا۟
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾ فَٱذْكُرُونِىٓ أَذْكُرْكُمْ
وَٱشْكُرُوا۟ لِى وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱسْتَعِينُوا۟ بِٱلصَّبْرِ
وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

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153. Since the *ummah* has been invested with world leadership, a set of necessary directives is now provided for its guidance. Before laying down these directives it seemed necessary to caution the Muslims that the office which had been conferred on them was indeed no bed of roses. On the contrary, it was a great and perilous responsibility. Once they undertook it, they would be subjected to all kinds of afflictions, put to all kinds of trials and tribulations and made to bear all kinds of deprivation. If, however, the Muslims persisted along the path of God despite the perils they would be rewarded with God's favour in full measure.

154. To acquire the strength that is needed to bear this heavy burden of responsibility the believers should do two things: they should develop patience and they should strengthen themselves by devoting themselves to Prayer.

Later we shall encounter elaborations which will show that 'patience' is a word embracing a whole set of moral virtues of the utmost importance. 'Patience' is indeed an indispensable key to success. Likewise, we shall later have occasion to note in some detail how Prayer prepares the Muslims, both as individuals and as a collective body, to carry out their mission.

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(154) And do not say of those who are killed in the way of Allah that they are dead; they are alive even though you have no knowledge of their life.[155] (155) We shall certainly test you by afflicting fear, hunger, loss of properties and lives and fruits upon you. Give glad tidings, then, to those who remain patient (156) and when an affliction smites them, they say: 'Verily to Allah do we belong, and it is to Him that we are destined to return.'[156] (157) Upon them will be the blessings and mercy of their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَن يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
أَمْوَٰتٌۢ بَلْ أَحْيَآءٌ وَلَٰكِن لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ
﴿١٥٤﴾ وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَىْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ
وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ
وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ
﴿١٥٥﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓا۟
إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۖ
وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

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155. The word 'death' as well as its general concept has a depressing effect. People have therefore been instructed not to refer to martyrs who laid down their lives for God as 'dead', since this might lead to the dissipation of the spirit which enables people to struggle and make sacrifices in God's cause. Instead, people have been instructed to bear in mind that anyone who lays down his life for God has in fact attained immortality. As well as being a statement of fact this also helps to arouse and sustain courage.

156. 'Saying' does not signify the mere making of a statement. It means a statement which is accompanied by a deep conviction in one's heart: 'To Allah do we belong.' This being so, a man is bound to think that whatever has been sacrificed for God has in fact attained its legitimate end, for it has been spent in the way of the One to whom all things truly belong.

'And it is to Him that we are destined to return' refers to the fact that man will not stay forever in this world and will return, sooner or later, to God. And if man is indeed destined to return to God why should he not return to Him having spent his all, having staked his life for His sake? This alternative is preferable to the pursuit of self-aggrandizement and then meeting death either by sickness or accident.

(158) Surely, al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah are the symbols of Allah. Hence, whoever performs *Ḥajj* (full Pilgrimage)[157] to the House (of Allah) or makes *'Umrah* (minor Pilgrimage), will find it is no sin for him to ambulate between the two.[158] And whoever does a good work voluntarily[159] should know that Allah is Appreciative, All-Knowing.

۞ إِنَّ ٱلصَّفَا وَٱلْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَآئِرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنْ حَجَّ ٱلْبَيْتَ أَوِ ٱعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَن يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ۚ وَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥٨﴾

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157. The pilgrimage to the Ka'bah along with a set of other rites on certain fixed dates of Dhu al-Ḥijjah is known as *Ḥajj*. Pilgrimage at other times is known as *'Umrah*.

158. Ṣafā and Marwah are the names of two hillocks near the Holy Mosque in Makka. To run between these two hillocks was among the rites which God had taught Abraham in connection with *Ḥajj*. Later, when Pagan Ignorance prevailed in Makka and the neighbouring regions, altars were built for Isāf at Ṣafā and for Nā'ilah at Marwah, and people began to circumambulate them. After the advent of the Prophet, when the light of Islam had spread to the people of Arabia, Muslims came to doubt whether running between Ṣafā and Marwah was one of the original rites of Pilgrimage or was merely an invidious religious innovation of the Age of Ignorance. If it was in fact such, they feared they might be committing an act of polytheism.

Moreover, we learn from a Tradition transmitted from 'Ā'ishah that even in pre-Islamic times the people of Madina were not favourably disposed to this practice. Although they believed in al-Manāt they did not believe in Isāf and Nā'ilah. For these reasons, it was necessary, at the time of the change of the *qiblah*, to dispel popular misconceptions about this rite. It seemed necessary to tell people that running between these two hillocks was part of the original rites of Pilgrimage and that the sanctity of Ṣafā and Marwah, far from being an invidious innovation of the people of the Age of Ignorance, stemmed from the revealed Law of God.

159. It is best that one should perform this ritual obligation with wholehearted devotion. But if devotion is lacking one is not thereby exempt from fulfilling one's obligation. One must perform this ritual if only out of a sense of duty.

(159) Those who conceal anything of the clear teachings and true guidance which We have sent down even though We have made them clear in Our Book, Allah curses such people and so do all who curse;[160] (160) but those who repent and make amends and openly declare (what they had concealed), such shall I pardon for I am Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.

(161) As for those who disbelieved[161] and died disbelieving, surely the curse of Allah and of the angels and of all men is on them. (162) Thus shall they abide and their chastisement shall not be lightened, nor shall they be given respite.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ
الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالْهُدَىٰ مِن بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ
لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ
وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّاعِنُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ
تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُوا فَأُولَٰئِكَ
أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ
﴿١٦٠﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ
أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ
وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنظَرُونَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

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160. The biggest failure of the Jews was that they kept the teachings contained in the Book of God confined to a limited class of people, the rabbis and professional theologians, instead of spreading them. They did not allow this knowledge to filter through even to the Jewish masses let alone the non-Jewish peoples of the world. Later, when errors and corruptions spread among them owing to widespread ignorance the Jewish theologians made no serious effort to root them out. Moreover, in order to maintain their hold on the Jewish masses they lent their tacit approval to every corrupting deviation from the true faith that gained currency.

The Muslims are being admonished to refrain from this kind of behaviour. The nation which has been charged with the guidance of the entire world is duty-bound to do its utmost to radiate true guidance, rather than keep it under lock and key as a miser hoards his money.

161. The original meaning of *kufr* is to conceal. This lent the word a nuance of denial and it began to be used as an antonym of *īmān*. *Īmān* means to believe, to accept, and to recognize. *Kufr*, on the contrary,

denotes refusal to believe, to deny, to reject. According to the Qur'ān there are several possible forms of disbelief. One is to refuse either to believe in the existence of God, to acknowledge His sovereignty, to recognize Him as the only Lord of the Universe and of mankind or to recognize Him as the only Lord and the only object of worship and adoration. The second form of disbelief is when a man recognizes the existence of God but still refuses to accept His ordinances and directives as the only source of true guidance, and as the true law for his life. The third form of disbelief is when even though a man recognizes in principle that he ought to follow the guidance of God he refuses to believe in the Prophets who were the means of communicating God's guidance to man. The fourth form of disbelief is to differentiate between one Prophet and another and, out of parochialism and bigotry, to accept some Prophets and reject others. The fifth form of disbelief is the refusal to recognize, either totally or partially, the teachings communicated by the Prophets, on God's behalf, concerning the beliefs, the principles of morality, and the laws for fashioning human life. The sixth form of disbelief is where a person theoretically accepts all that he should accept but wilfully disobeys God's ordinances and persists in this disobedience, and considers disobedience rather than obedience to God to be the true principle of life.

All these modes of thought and action are forms of rebellion towards God and the Qur'ān characterizes each of them as *kufr*. In addition, the term *kufr* is used at several places in the Qur'ān in the sense of ingratitude and in this usage it signifies the exact opposite of *shukr* (gratitude). Gratefulness consists in feeling thankful to one's benefactor, in duly recognizing the value of his benevolence; in making use of it in a manner pleasing to its bestower, and in being utterly loyal to him. Ingratitude denotes, on the contrary, that the man concerned has either failed to recognize the bounty of his benefactor, or considers it to be either the outcome of his own power and ability or else that of some other person's favour or intercession. Another form of ingratitude consists in failing to recognize fully the worth of the bounty received and in either allowing it to be wasted or to be used in contravention of the will of the benefactor; this ingratitude includes infidelity and treachery towards the benefactor in disregard of his benevolence and kindness. This kind of *kufr* is known in ordinary language as ungratefulness.

(163) Your God is One God, there is no God but He; the Merciful, the Compassionate. (164) (To guide) those who use their reason (to this truth) there are many signs in the creation of the heaven and the earth, in the constant alternation of night and day, in the vessels which speed across the sea carrying the things which are of profit to men, in the water which Allah sends down from the heaven thereby quickening the earth after its death, in the scattering of every kind of animal in the earth, and in the courses of the winds and the clouds pressed into service between heaven and earth.[162] (165) Yet among men some take others as equals to Allah[163] and love them as Allah alone should be loved; but those who (truly) believe, they love Allah more than all else.[164]

وَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦٣﴾ إِنَّ فِى خَلْقِ
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ
وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَٱلْفُلْكِ ٱلَّتِى تَجْرِى فِى
ٱلْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنفَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ
مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن مَّآءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ
دَآبَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ ٱلرِّيَٰحِ وَٱلسَّحَابِ
ٱلْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ
لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾ وَمِنَ
ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَندَادًا
يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ ٱللَّهِ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟
أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِّلَّهِ

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162. If a man were to observe the constant operation of this universe, reflect on it in a manner befitting a rational being, and think about it without either stubbornness or bias, he would find sufficient signs to convince him that this gigantic system is absolutely subservient to the will of the Omnipotent and Wise Being, Who alone wields all power and authority. Moreover, this system seems to be such as to rule out all possibility of any interference from others whether independent of the Creator of the universe or in partnership with Him. Since this One True God is the Lord of all creation and none else is in possession of any power or authority, none is entitled to any share in His godhead or overlordship.

163. There are certain attributes which belong exclusively to God. Moreover, there are certain duties that man owes to God by virtue of His being his Lord. The indictment of the Qur'ān is that the people in question

If only the wrong-doers were to perceive now – as they will perceive when they will see the chastisement – that all power belongs to Allah alone, and that Allah is severe in chastisement!

وَلَوْ يَرَى ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓا۟ إِذْ يَرَوْنَ ٱلْعَذَابَ أَنَّ ٱلْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعَذَابِ ﴿١٦٥﴾

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ascribe to others than God the attributes which are exclusively His and likewise consider others to be the rightful claimants of certain rights over man which belong only to God. To be Lord of the entire complex of causal relationships found in the universe, to dispense the needs and requirements of people, to deliver them from distress and affliction, to heed complaints and respond to lamentations and prayers, and having full knowledge of all that is apparent as well as all that is hidden, are the exclusive attributes of God.

Furthermore, there are certain rights which God alone may claim: that His creatures should recognize Him alone as their Sovereign, prostrate themselves before Him alone in recognition of their bondage to Him, turn to Him alone for the fulfilment of their prayers, call Him alone for help and succour, place their trust is none save Him, centre their hopes and expectations only in His Munificence, and fear Him alone both in public and in private.

In the same way, being the only Absolute Sovereign of the universe, it befits none save God to lay down what is permitted and what is prohibited for His subjects, to prescribe their rights and duties, to command them what to do and what not to do, to direct them as to how the energy and resources bestowed on them, by God, should be expended.

Again, it is God alone Who can ask His subjects to acknowledge His sovereignty, to accept His commands as the source of law, to consider Him alone to be the Lord entitled to command men, to consider His commands supreme, and to turn to Him alone for correct guidance. Whoever either ascribes to any being other than God any of the aforementioned attributes or recognizes the claim of anyone save God to be entitled to any of the above-mentioned rights over His creatures is in fact setting up that being as a rival to God, and placing him on the same plane as God. By the same token, any individual or institution claiming to possess any of the exclusive attributes and rights of God (as mentioned above), is in fact claiming a position parallel and equal to that of God even though the claim to godhead may not have been categorically spelled out.

164. True faith requires that a man should give absolute priority to seeking God's good pleasure and should hold nothing too dear to sacrifice for the sake of God.

(166) At that moment those who have been followed will disown their followers, and they will see the chastisement, and their resources will be cut asunder. (167) And the followers will then say: 'Oh if only we might return again, we would disown them as they have disowned us!'[165] Thus Allah will show them their works in a manner which will cause them bitter regrets. Never will they come out of the Fire.

(168) O men! Eat of the lawful and pure things in the earth and follow not in the footsteps of Satan.[166] For surely he is your open enemy; (169) he only commands you to evil and indecency and to attribute to Allah the things concerning which you have no knowledge.[167]

إِذْ تَبَرَّأَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتُّبِعُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّبَعُوا۟ وَرَأَوُا۟ ٱلْعَذَابَ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ
بِهِمُ ٱلْأَسْبَابُ ﴿١٦٦﴾ وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّبَعُوا۟ لَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةً فَنَتَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُمْ
كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوا۟ مِنَّا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ ٱللَّهُ
أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ حَسَرَٰتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ وَمَا هُم
بِخَٰرِجِينَ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٦٧﴾ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا
ٱلنَّاسُ كُلُوا۟ مِمَّا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ حَلَٰلًا
طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۚ
إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾ إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُم
بِٱلسُّوٓءِ وَٱلْفَحْشَآءِ وَأَن تَقُولُوا۟ عَلَى
ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

165. Here particular reference is made to the dismal end of those so-called religious leaders who mislead people, and of their gullible followers who fall easy prey to their deception. This has been done in order to warn the Muslims to beware of the errors which misled former nations, and to impress upon them the need to develop the capacity to distinguish between true and spurious leaders so as to avoid being led by the latter.

166. The demand made here is that they should violate all those taboos in matters of food and drink which have their basis in superstitious beliefs or irrational usages.

167. The notion that all superstitious customs and taboos are God-given religious teachings is an example of satanic deception, pure and simple, since there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that they are from God.

(170) And when they are told: 'Follow what Allah has revealed', they say: 'No, we shall follow what we found our forefathers practising.'[168] What! Even if their forefathers lacked understanding, and right guidance? (171) Those who have refused to follow the way of Allah resemble cattle; when the shepherd calls them they hear nothing except shouting and crying;[169] they are deaf, dumb and blind, and so they understand nothing.

(172) Believers! Eat of the pure things We have provided you for sustenance and give thanks to Allah[170] if it is Him that you serve.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱتَّبِعُوا مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ قَالُوا
بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَآ أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ ءَابَآءَنَآ أَوَلَوْ
كَانَ ءَابَآؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ
شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾ وَمَثَلُ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى يَنْعِقُ بِمَا
لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَآءً وَنِدَآءً صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ
عُمْىٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَـٰتِ
مَا رَزَقْنَـٰكُمْ وَٱشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ
إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

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168. The only possible argument and justification for these taboos was that they had been sanctified by the practice of their forefathers from whom they had allegedly come down generation after generation. Fickle-minded as they were, they deemed this argument to be sufficiently persuasive.

169. This parable has two aspects. On the one hand, it suggests that these people are like herds of irrational animals, dumb cattle, that always follow their herdsmen, moving on as they hear their calls without understanding what they mean. (Thus these people follow their leaders even though they do not grasp where it is they are being led to – Ed.) On the other hand, it also suggests that when the Truth is preached to them they show such insensitivity to it that one may as well be addressing animals who merely comprehend sounds but are incapable of understanding their meaning. The expression lends itself to both interpretations.

170. The believers are told that if by having believed they have committed themselves to following the Law of God as they claim then they should abandon all taboos and prohibitions imposed by the pundits and priests, by the rabbis and church fathers, by the monks and recluses, and

(173) He has made unlawful to you only carrion and blood and the flesh of swine and that over which there has been pronounced the name of someone other than Allah;[171] there shall be no sin upon him who is constrained (to eat them) even though he neither covets them nor exceeds the indispensable need: Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.[172]

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ بِهِۦ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٧٣﴾

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by their own forefathers. Although they were required to abstain from whatever had been prohibited by God, they ought to feel no compunction with regard to consuming all that He had permitted. This has also been alluded to in the saying of the Prophet reported in a Tradition in the following words: 'Whoever prays in our manner, turns towards our *qiblah* (in Prayer), and eats (the flesh) of our slaughtered (animals), that person is Muslim.' (Bukhārī, 'K. al-Ṣalāh', 28; 'K. al-Aḍāḥī', 12; Muslim, 'K. al-Aḍāḥī', 6; Nasā'ī, 'K. al-Īmān', 9; 'K. al-Ḍaḥāyā', 17 – Ed.) This means that in spite of praying and facing towards the *qiblah*, a person is not fully assimilated into Islam as long as he maintains the pre-Islamic taboos in matters of eating and drinking and holds on to the fetters of superstition forged by the victims of Ignorance. A person's adherence to these taboos is indicative of the fact that the poison of Ignorance continues to flow in his veins.

171. This applies to the flesh of an animal slaughtered in the name of anything and anyone other than God as well as to the food prepared as an offering to someone other than God. God alone is the master of everything – of the animal whose flesh we consume as well as of every other kind of food – and it is He Who has mercifully provided us with them. Hence, if it is appropriate to pronounce any name as an expression of gratitude, of consecration, it can only be the name of God. To use anyone else's name means that we believe that there is some other being either instead of or in addition to God which deserves to be acknowledged as our Lord and Benefactor.

172. This verse grants permission to use prohibited things with three stipulations. First, one must be in a state of extreme compulsion, for example, being gravely ill or being so hungry and thirsty that one's very

(174) Those who conceal anything of the Book sent down by Allah and sell it away for a trifling gain are merely filling their bellies with Fire.[173] Allah will neither address them on the Day of Resurrection, nor shall He pronounce them 'pure'.[174] A painful chastisement lies in store for them. (175) They are the ones who bought error in exchange for true guidance, and chastisement in exchange for forgiveness. How patient they are in enduring the Fire! (176) This is so because Allah sent down the Book with the Truth, but those who disagreed concerning the Book veered far away from the Truth. ►

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكۡتُمُونَ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَيَشۡتَرُونَ بِهِۦ ثَمَنٗا
قَلِيلًا أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ مَا يَأۡكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمۡ
إِلَّا ٱلنَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ ٱللَّهُ يَوۡمَ
ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمۡ وَلَهُمۡ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٤﴾ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱشۡتَرَوُاْ ٱلضَّلَٰلَةَ بِٱلۡهُدَىٰ
وَٱلۡعَذَابَ بِٱلۡمَغۡفِرَةِۚ فَمَآ
أَصۡبَرَهُمۡ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٧٥﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ
ٱللَّهَ نَزَّلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۗ وَإِنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ ٱخۡتَلَفُواْ فِي ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَفِي شِقَاقِۭ
بَعِيدٖ ﴿١٧٦﴾

life is in danger, and a prohibited thing is all that is available to save one's life. Second, the person concerned should have no inclination to violate the Law of God. Third, in consuming the prohibited thing one should not exceed the limits of bare necessity. If a few bites or a few drops are enough to save one's life, one ought not to go beyond the absolute minimum.

173. This means that the blame for the growth of whole new codes consisting of superstitions, perverted customs, and unjustifiable taboos lay squarely on the shoulders of those religious scholars who had knowledge of the Scriptures but failed to transmit their knowledge to the common people. Moreover, later, when erroneous practices began to spread among them they remained mute spectators of this drama. Indeed, some of them kept wilfully silent about these matters thinking that their interests would be better served if the Scripture remained a sealed book and its injunctions were kept beyond the access of the common people.

174. This is a refutation of the false claims made by their religious leaders and a clarification of the misconceptions regarding their positions and

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(177) Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or towards the west;[175] true righteousness consists in believing in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book and the Prophets, and in giving away one's property in love of Him to one's kinsmen, the orphans, the poor and the wayfarer, and to those who ask for help, and in freeing the necks of slaves, and in establishing Prayer and dispensing the Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*). True righteousness is attained by those who are faithful to their promise once they have made it and by those who remain steadfast in adversity and affliction and at the time of battle between Truth and falsehood. Such are the truthful ones; such are the God-fearing.

۞ لَّيْسَ ٱلْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ
ٱلْمَشْرِقِ وَٱلْمَغْرِبِ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ
وَٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ وَءَاتَى ٱلْمَالَ عَلَىٰ
حُبِّهِۦ ذَوِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ
وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينَ وَٱبْنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَٱلسَّآئِلِينَ
وَفِى ٱلرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَى
ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا
عَٰهَدُوا۟ ۖ وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ فِى ٱلْبَأْسَآءِ
وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَحِينَ ٱلْبَأْسِ ۗ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ
صَدَقُوا۟ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

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privileges which these leaders had been spreading among the common people. They spared no efforts to give the impression that they were sacred beings and that anyone who attached himself to them would necessarily earn God's forgiveness through their intercession. Here God is telling them that He takes no notice of people who are unworthy to intercede for themselves, let alone able to intercede for others.

175. Turning one's face towards the east or the west is mentioned here only by way of illustration. The actual purpose of the verse is to emphasize that the observance of certain outward religious rites, the performance of certain formal religious acts out of conformism, and the manifestation of certain familiar forms of piety do not constitute that essential righteousness which alone carries weight with God and earns His recognition and approval.

(178) Believers! Retribution is prescribed for you in cases of killing;[176] if a freeman is guilty then the freeman; if a slave is guilty then the slave; if a female is guilty, then the female.[177]

176. Retribution, that is, blood revenge, is based on the principle that what a person has done to others ought to be done to him. This does not mean that the murderer should be put to death in exactly the same manner as he killed but that the murderer should be subjected to the same act, i.e. killing, as that to which he subjected his victim.

177. In pre-Islamic Arabia people tried to take blood revenge upon the murderer's family and tribe, and the retaliation corresponded to the value placed on the blood of the victim. Their desire for revenge was not quenched merely by putting the murderer to death. They preferred to put to death tens and even hundreds of people to avenge the one life they had lost. If a respected member of their tribe was killed by an ordinary member of another, it was not deemed enough to put to death the actual murderer. They preferred to kill a man of the murderer's tribe equal in standing to the victim, and even several members of the murderer's tribe. However, if the victim was a man of humble standing from another tribe, and the murderer from their tribe happened to be a man of high standing, they were unwilling to permit the execution of the murderer.

This attitude is not confined to the Ignorance of that bygone age. Even today those nations that are supposedly the most civilized will often proclaim, officially and quite brazenly, that if one of their citizens is killed they will execute scores of the killer's compatriots. In addition we often hear that to avenge the murder of one person a large number of hostages belonging to a subject nation have been shot dead. One of the 'civilized' nations of the present century subjected the whole Egyptian nation to blood revenge because one of their officials, Sir Lee Stack, was killed by an Egyptian. The courts of justice of these so-called civilized nations have been known to refrain from passing the death sentence on convicted homicides when they happened to be members of the ruling nation while their victims belonged to the subject nation. It is iniquities such as these that God seeks to end by means of the directive contained in this verse. What God says here is that the killer ought to be put to death irrespective of his status and that of the victim.

But if something of a murderer's guilt is remitted by his brother[178] this should be adhered to in fairness,[179] and payment be made in a goodly manner. This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord; and for him who transgresses after that[180] there is a painful chastisement. (179) Men of understanding, there is life for you in retribution[181] that you may guard yourselves against violating the Law.

فَمَنْ عُفِيَ لَهُۥ مِنْ أَخِيهِ شَىْءٌ فَٱتِّبَاعٌۢ
بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَآءٌ إِلَيْهِ بِإِحْسَٰنٍ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ
تَخْفِيفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۗ فَمَنِ
ٱعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَهُۥ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
﴿١٧٨﴾ وَلَكُمْ فِى ٱلْقِصَاصِ حَيَوٰةٌ يَٰٓأُو۟لِى
ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٩﴾

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178. The very use of the word 'brother' in this context suggests that as a general rule one ought to incline towards leniency. Despite the bitterness felt towards someone who has shed the blood of, say, one's father, the murderer is still one's brother by virtue of being a member of the human family. Hence if one who has been wronged can overcome the vengeful spirit aroused by his erring brother's deed, this attitude of forgiveness will be worthy of his humanity.

This verse also makes it clear that according to the Islamic penal law the question of homicide can be settled by the mutual consent of the two parties. It is the prerogative of the heirs of the victim to forgive the murderer, and if it is exercised not even a judge has the power to insist on carrying out the death sentence. In such a case, however, as the following verse mentions, the murderer will be made to pay blood money.

179. The term *ma'rūf* occurs quite frequently in the Qur'ān. It refers to conduct which is reckoned fair and equitable by the generality of disinterested people. The generally accepted usages and customs of life are called *'urf* and *ma'rūf* in Islamic terminology, and they are considered valid in all those matters not specifically regulated by the *Sharī'ah*.

180. Excess might consist of trying to avenge the blood of the murdered man even after his heirs have settled the matter and received blood money or of efforts on the part of the murderer to delay the payment of blood money thus repaying the heirs of the victim with ingratitude for their kindness and goodwill.

181. This refutes another notion of Ignorance, a notion ingrained in the minds of many people, both past and present. On the one hand there are

(180) It is decreed that when death approaches, those of you who leave behind property shall bequeath equitably to parents and kinsmen. This is an obligation on the God-fearing.[182] ►

some people who, entrenched in Ignorance, tend to exceed the limits of moderation in revenge. At the other end of the spectrum stand those who are opposed in principle to the concept of executing a murderer. They have conducted such intense, world-wide propaganda against the death penalty that it has become abhorrent to many people. In fact the impact of this propaganda has been so great that in many countries the death penalty has been abolished altogether.

The Qur'ān, however, addresses itself on this question to wise and intelligent people and cautions them against such immoderate leniency by proclaiming that the survival of human society rests on the application of the death penalty for homicide. A society which holds inviolable the lives of those who disregard the sanctity of human life is in fact rearing snakes and serpents. To save the life of one murderer is to risk the lives of many innocent human beings.

182. This injunction relates to a period of time when no rules had been laid down for the distribution of inheritance. Thus everyone was required to make testamentary disposal of their property so as to ensure that no disputes arose in the family and no legitimate claimant to inheritance was deprived of his due share. Later when God revealed a set of laws regarding the distribution of inheritance (see Qur'ān 4: 11 ff.), the Prophet elucidated further the laws relating to testamentary disposition and inheritance by expounding two rules.

First, that no person can make any will regarding his estate in favour of any of his legal heirs. Their portions were laid down in the Qur'ān and neither increase nor decrease in this was permissible, nor could any heir be disinherited, nor anything willed in favour of any heir over and above his legal portion. (See the Tradition: 'There may be no will in favour of the heir.' See Abū Dā'ūd, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 6; Tirmidhī, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 5; Nasā'ī, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 5; Ibn Mājah, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 5 – Ed.)

Second, that testamentary disposition might be made to the extent of one third of the estate, but no more. (See Bukhārī, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 2 and 3; Muslim, 'Al-Waṣīyah', 5–10; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Al-Waṣāyā', 2 – Ed.)

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(181) Then if anyone alters the will after hearing it, this sin shall be upon them who alter. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (182) He who suspects that the testator has committed an error or injustice and then brings about a settlement among the parties concerned incurs no sin. Surely Allah is Much-Forgiving, Most Compassionate.

(183) Believers! Fasting is enjoined upon you, as it was enjoined upon those before you, that you become God-fearing.[183] ►

فَمَنۢ بَدَّلَهُۥ بَعْدَ مَا سَمِعَهُۥ فَإِنَّمَآ إِثْمُهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُبَدِّلُونَهُۥٓ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨١﴾ فَمَنْ خَافَ مِن مُّوصٍ جَنَفًا أَوْ إِثْمًا فَأَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٨٢﴾ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

The purpose underlying these explanatory directives of the Prophet seems to be that at least two-thirds of the estate should be left aside to be distributed among the legal heirs according to the Qur'ānic rules, and that a will could be made in respect of the whole or part of the remaining one-third. This could be made in favour of either relatives, whether close or distant, who are not legal heirs, or others not related by the blood-tie but who are deserving of assistance. Likewise, a will could be made in favour of charitable causes which are found worthy of support.

In later times people began to regard this directive regarding testamentary disposal as a recommendation only. The result was that this rule fell largely into disuse. It is significant, however, that the Qur'ān mentions it as 'an obligation on the God-fearing'. Were Muslims to make this injunction an operative institution no trace would remain of the problems which agitate their minds respecting the Islamic law of inheritance, for example grand-children whose parents had predeceased their paternal or maternal grand-parents and who, under Islamic law, were not entitled to inherit from their grandparents. (The author suggests that re-activating the Qur'ānic directive on testamentary disposal is the answer to this and similar problems – Ed.)

183. Like most other injunctions of Islam those relating to fasting were revealed gradually. In the beginning the Prophet (peace be on him) had instructed the Muslims to fast three days in every month, though this was

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(184) Fasting is for a fixed number of days, and if one of you be sick, or if one of you be on a journey, you will fast the same number of other days later on. For those who are capable of fasting (but still do not fast) there is a redemption: feeding a needy man for each day missed. Whoever, voluntarily, does more good than is required, will find it is better for him;[184] and that you should fast is better for you, if you only know.[185]

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۚ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم
مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ
أُخَرَ ۚ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ
طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ ۖ فَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ
خَيْرٌ لَّهُ ۚ وَأَن تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۖ
إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٤﴾

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not obligatory. When the injunction in the present verse was later revealed in 2 A.H., a degree of relaxation was introduced: it was stipulated that those who did not fast despite their capacity to endure it were obliged to feed one poor person as an expiation for each day of obligatory fasting missed (see verse 184). Another injunction was revealed later (see verse 185) and here the relaxation in respect of able-bodied persons was revoked. However, for the sick, the traveller, the pregnant, the breast-feeding women and the aged who could not endure fasting, the relaxation was retained. (See Bukhārī, 'Tafsīr al-Qur'ān', 25; Tirmidhī, 'Ṣawm', 21; Nasā'ī, 'Ṣiyām', 51, 62, 64; Ibn Mājah, 'Ṣiyām', 12; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 104; vol. 4, pp. 347 and 418; vol. 5, p. 29 – Ed.)

184. This act of extra merit could either be feeding more than the one person required or both fasting *and* feeding the poor.

185. Here ends the early injunction with regard to fasting which was revealed in 2 A.H. prior to the Battle of Badr. The verses that follow were revealed about one year later and are linked with the preceding verses since they deal with the same subject.

(185) During the month of Ramaḍān the Qur'ān was sent down as a guidance to the people with clear signs of the true guidance, and as the Criterion (between right and wrong). So those of you who live to see that month should fast it, and whoever is sick or on a journey should fast the same number of other days instead. Allah wants ease and not hardship for you so that you may complete the number of days required,[186] magnify Allah for what He has guided you to, and give thanks to Him.[187]

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ
الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ
وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ
فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ
وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ
فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ
بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ
الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ
وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

186. Whether a person should or should not fast while on a journey is left to individual discretion. We find that among the Companions who accompanied the Prophet on journeys some fasted whereas others did not; none objected to the conduct of another. The Prophet himself did not always fast when travelling. On one journey a person was so overwhelmed by hunger that he collapsed; the Prophet disapproved when he learned that the man had been fasting. During wars the Prophet used to prevent people from fasting so that they would not lack energy for the fight. It has been reported by 'Umar that two military expeditions took place in the month of Ramaḍān. The first was the Battle of Badr and the second the conquest of Makka. On both occasions the Companions abstained from fasting, and, according to Ibn 'Umar, on the occasion of the conquest of Makka the Prophet proclaimed that people should not fast since it was a day of fighting. In other Traditions the Prophet is reported to have said that people should not fast when they had drawn close to the enemy, since abstention from fasting would lead to greater strength. (See Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 329, and vol. 5, pp. 205 and 209; Dārimī, 'Ṣawm', 41; Muslim, 'Ṣiyām', 92; Nasā'ī, 'Ṣiyām', 47; Bukhārī, 'Maghāzī', 71; Muslim, 'Ṣiyām', 102; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 21, 35, 46; Tirmidhī, 'Ṣawm', 18; Nasā'ī, 'Ṣiyām', 52; Bukhārī, 'Jihād', 29; Muslim, 'Ṣiyām', 98; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṣawm', 42; Muslim, 'Ṣiyām', 102, 103, 105; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, 99; Tirmidhī, 'Ṣawm', 19 – Ed.)

The duration of a journey for which it becomes permissible for a person to abstain from fasting is not absolutely clear from any statement of the

(186) (O Muḥammad!) When My servants ask you about Me tell them I indeed am quite near; I hear and answer the call of the caller whenever he calls Me. Let them listen to My call and believe in Me;[188] perhaps they will then be guided aright.[189]	وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ۝١٨٦

Prophet, (cf. relevant Traditions Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṣawm', 46, 47; Nasā'ī, 'Ṣiyām', 54, 55; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa'*, 'Ṣiyām', 21, 27 – Ed.) In addition the practice of the Companions was not uniform. It would seem that any journey which is commonly regarded as such, and which is attended by the circumstances generally associated with travelling, should be deemed sufficient justification for not fasting.

Jurists agree that one does not have to fast on the day of commencing a journey; one may eat either at the point of departure or after the actual journey has commenced. Either course is sanctioned by the practice of the Companions. Jurists, however, are not agreed as to whether or not the residents of a city under attack may abstain from fasting even though they are not actually travelling. Ibn Taymīyah favours the permissibility of abstention from fasting and supports his view with very forceful arguments.

187. This indicates that fasting need not be confined, exclusively, to Ramaḍān. For those who fail to fast during that month owing to some legitimate reason God has kept the door of compensation open during other months of the year so that they need not be deprived of the opportunity to express their gratitude to Him for His great bounty in revealing the Qur'ān.

It should be noted here that fasting in Ramaḍān has not only been declared an act of worship and devotion and a means to nourish piety but has also been characterized as an act of gratefulness to God for His great bounty of true guidance in the form of the Qur'ān. In fact, the best way of expressing gratitude for someone's bounty or benevolence is to prepare oneself, to the best of one's ability, to achieve the purpose for which that bounty has been bestowed. The Qur'ān has been revealed so that we may know the way that leads to God's good pleasure, follow that way ourselves and direct the world along it. Fasting is an excellent means by which to prepare ourselves for shouldering this task. Hence fasting during the month of the revelation of the Qur'ān is more than an act of worship and more than an excellent course of moral training; it is also an appropriate form for the expression of our thankfulness to God for the bounty of the Qur'ān.

(187) It has been made lawful to go in to your wives during the night of the fast. They are your garment, and you are theirs.[190] Allah knows you betrayed yourselves and He mercifully relented and pardoned you. So you may now associate intimately with your wives and benefit from the enjoyment Allah has made lawful for you;[191] and eat and drink[192] at night until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of the night,[193] then (give up all that and) complete your fasting until night sets in.[194]

أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ ٱلصِّيَامِ ٱلرَّفَثُ
إِلَىٰ نِسَآئِكُمْ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ
لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ عَلِمَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنتُمْ
تَخْتَانُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ
عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنكُمْ فَٱلْـَٔـٰنَ بَـٰشِرُوهُنَّ
وَٱبْتَغُوا۟ مَا كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا۟
وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ ٱلْخَيْطُ
ٱلْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ ٱلْخَيْطِ ٱلْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ ٱلْفَجْرِ
ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا۟ ٱلصِّيَامَ إِلَى ٱلَّيْلِ

188. Even though people can neither see God nor subject Him to any other form of sense perception this should not make them feel that God is remote from them. On the contrary, He is so close to each and every person that whenever any person so wishes he can communicate with his Lord. So much so that God hears and responds even to the prayers which remain within the innermost recesses of the heart.

People exhaust themselves by approaching false and powerless beings whom they foolishly fancy to be their deities but who have neither the power to hear nor to grant their prayers. But God, the omnipotent Lord and the absolute Master of this vast universe, Who wields all power and authority, is so close to human beings that they can always approach Him without the intercession of any intermediaries, and can put to Him their prayers and requests.

189. This announcement of God's closeness to man may open his eyes to the Truth, may turn him to the right way wherein lies his success and well-being.

190. Just as nothing intervenes between a person's body and his clothes, so nothing can intervene between a man and his wife; it is a relationship of inalienable intimacy.

191. Although there was no categorical ordinance in the early days prohibiting sexual intercourse between husband and wife during the nights

of Ramaḍān, people generally assumed that this was not permissible. Despite the feeling that their action was either not permitted or was at least disapproved of they did at times approach their wives. Such a betrayal of conscience can encourage a sinful disposition. God, therefore, first reproaches them with their lack of integrity, for this is what was objectionable. As for the act itself, God makes it clear that it is quite permissible. Henceforth they might engage in sexual intercourse as a perfectly lawful act unencumbered by feelings of guilt.

192. In this connection, too, there was a misapprehension at first. Some thought that eating and drinking were absolutely prohibited after the performance of the *'Ishā'* (Night) Prayer. Others thought that one could eat and drink so long as one had not fallen asleep, but that if one had it was not permissible to eat on reawakening. These were people's own fancies and often caused great inconvenience. This verse seeks to remove all such misconceptions. It clearly lays down the duration of the fast: from dawn until sunset. Between sunset and dawn it is permissible to eat, to drink, and to indulge in the legitimate gratification of sexual desires.

At the same time the Prophet introduced the pre-fasting repast, recommending a good meal just before dawn.

193. In fixing the time of obligatory rites, Islam has been mindful that these timings should be so clear and simple that people, at all stages of development, should be able to follow them. This is why Islam bases its timing on conspicuous natural phenomena and not on the clock.

Some people object that this principle of timing is untenable in areas close to the poles, where night and day each last for about six months. This objection is based on a very superficial knowledge of geography. In point of fact neither day nor night lasts for six months in those areas – not in the sense in which people living near the Equator conceive of night and day. The signs of morning and evening appear at the poles with unfailing regularity and it is on this basis that people time their sleeping and waking, their professional work, their play and recreation. Even in the days before watches were common, the people of countries like Finland, Norway and Greenland used to fix the hours of the day and night by means of various signs that appeared on the horizon. Just as those signs helped them to determine their schedules in other matters, so they should enable them to time their various Prayers, the pre-fast meal and the breaking of the fast.

194. 'Complete your fasting until night sets in' means that the time of fasting ends with nightfall, i.e. sunset marks the breaking of the fast. The precise time of the end of the pre-dawn repast is when a lean strip of aurora appears at the eastern end of the horizon and begins to grow. The time to break one's fast starts when the darkness of night seems to have begun to appear over the eastern horizon.

But do not associate intimately with your wives during the period when you are on retreat in the mosques.[195] These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, even draw near them.[196] Thus does Allah make His signs clear to mankind that they may stay away from evil.

وَلَا تُبَٰشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنتُمْ عَٰكِفُونَ فِى ٱلْمَسَٰجِدِ ۗ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرَبُوهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

In our own time, some people have adopted an attitude of extreme caution with regard to the time of both the end and start of fasting. The Law has not fixed these schedules with rigid precision. If a person wakes up just at the crack of dawn it is proper for him to eat and drink hastily. According to a Tradition the Prophet said: 'If anyone of you hears the call for [the morning] Prayer while he is eating he should not stop immediately, but should finish eating to the extent of his bare need.' (Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṣiyām', 14 – Ed.) Similarly one need not wait for the light of day to disappear fully before breaking the fast. The Prophet, for instance, used to ask Bilāl to bring him something to drink as soon as the sun had set. Bilāl expressed his astonishment, pointing out that the light of day could still be observed. To this the Prophet replied that the time of fasting came to an end when the darkness of night began to rise from the east. (Muslim, 'Ṣiyām', 10; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṣiyām', 15; etc. – Ed.)

195. 'On retreat in the mosque' refers to the religious practice of spending the last ten days of Ramaḍān in the mosque, consecrating this time to the remembrance of God. In this state, known as *i'tikāf*, one may go out of the mosque only for the absolutely necessary requirements of life, but one must stay away from gratifying one's sexual desire.

196. The directive here is neither to exceed nor draw near the limits set by God. This means that it is dangerous for a man to skirt the boundaries of disobedience; prudence demands that one should keep some distance from these lest one's steps inadvertently lead one to cross them. The same principle has been enunciated in a Tradition in which the Prophet said: 'Every sovereign has an enclosed pasture and the enclosed pasture of God consists of His prohibitions. So, whosoever keeps grazing around that pasture is likely to fall into it.' (Bukhārī, 'Īmān', 36; 'Buyū'', 3; Muslim, 'Musāqāh', 107; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Buyū'', 3; Tirmidhī, 'Buyū'', 1; Nasā'ī, 'Buyū'', 3; 'Ashribah', 50; Ibn Mājah, 'Fitan', 14 – Ed.)

It is a pity that many people, who are not conversant with the spirit of the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law), insist on using these boundaries to the limits.

(188) Do not usurp one another's possessions by false means, nor proffer your possessions to the authorities so that you may sinfully and knowingly usurp a portion of another's possessions.[197]

(189) People question you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: 'They are signs to determine time for the sake of people and for the Pilgrimage.'[198] Also tell them: 'True righteousness is not that you enter your houses from the back; righteousness lies in fearing Allah. So, enter your houses by their doors, and fear Allah that you might attain true success.'[199]

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوٓا۟ أَمْوَٰلَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ
وَتُدْلُوا۟ بِهَآ إِلَى ٱلْحُكَّامِ
لِتَأْكُلُوا۟ فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَٰلِ ٱلنَّاسِ
بِٱلْإِثْمِ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾
۞ يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِىَ
مَوَٰقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَٱلْحَجِّ ۗ وَلَيْسَ ٱلْبِرُّ
بِأَن تَأْتُوا۟ ٱلْبُيُوتَ مِن ظُهُورِهَا
وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلْبِرَّ مَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰ ۗ وَأْتُوا۟
ٱلْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَٰبِهَا ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

Many religious scholars exert themselves in finding out arguments to justify this attitude, and a point is thus reached where only a hair's breadth separates obedience from disobedience. Consequently many people fall prey to disobedience, even to downright error and wrong-doing. For once a man arrives at this point he is seldom capable of discerning between right and wrong, and maintaining the absolute self-control needed to keep within the lawful limits.

197. One meaning of this verse is that people should not try to seek illegitimate benefits by bribing magistrates. Another meaning is that when a person is aware that the property he claims rightfully belongs to someone else, he should not file a judicial petition either because the other party lacks the evidence to support their case or because, by trickery and cunning the petitioner can usurp that property. It is possible that the judicial authority would decide the case in favour of the false claimant on the basis of the formal strength of the claim, but as this judicial verdict would merely be the result of the chicanery to which the claimant had resorted he would not become its rightful owner. In spite of the judgement of the court the property would remain unlawful for him in the sight of God. It has been reported in a Tradition that the Prophet said: 'I am merely a human being

and you bring to me your disputes. It is possible that some of you will be more impressive in argument than others, so that I may give judgement in favour of one on the basis of what I hear. Beware that if I award to someone what belongs to his brother, I will have assigned to him a lump of Fire.' (Bukhārī, 'Shahādāt', 27; Muslim, 'Aqḍiyah', 4; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Aqḍiyah', 7; Tirmidhī, 'Aḥkām', 11, 18; Nasā'ī, 'Quḍāt', 12, 33; Ibn Mājah, 'Aḥkām', 5, etc. – Ed.)

198. The waxing and waning of the moon has attracted men's attentions throughout the ages and all kinds of fanciful ideas, superstitions and rituals have been, and are still today, associated with it. The moon was considered the basis of good and bad omens. Certain dates were considered auspicious and others inauspicious for starting journeys, for beginning new tasks, for weddings and so on on the ground that the rising and setting of the moon, its waxing and waning and its eclipse affect human destiny. The Arabs too had their share of such superstitions. It was therefore natural that enquiries regarding such matters should be addressed to the Prophet.

In response, God says that the waxing and waning of the moon is nothing more than a physical phenomenon. By its appearance in the firmament the moon enables man to divide his year and it can thus be considered nature's own calendar. Particular reference is made to *Ḥajj* because it occupied the position of highest importance in the religious, cultural and economic life of the Arabs. Four months of the year were specified since they were the months of major and minor Pilgrimage (*Ḥajj* and '*Umrah*). During these months there was to be no warfare and the routes were completely safe for travelling. Thanks to the peace and tranquillity thus established, trade and commerce prospered.

199. One superstitious custom of the Arabs was that once they entered the state of consecration for Pilgrimage they did not enter their houses by the door. Instead, they either leapt over the walls from the rear or climbed through windows which they had specially erected for that purpose. On returning from journeys, too, they entered their houses from the rear. In this verse this superstitious custom is denounced, as are all superstitious customs; it is pointed out that the essence of moral excellence consists of fearing God and abstaining from disobeying His commands. Those meaningless customs by which people felt bound, out of blind adherence to the traditions of their forefathers, and which had no effect at all on man's ultimate destiny, had nothing to do with moral excellence.

(190) Fight against those who fight against you in the way of Allah,[200] but do not transgress, for Allah does not love transgressors.[201] (191) Kill them whenever you confront them and drive them out from where they drove you out. (For though killing is sinful) wrongful persecution is even worse than killing.[202] Do not fight against them near the Holy Mosque unless they fight against you; but if they fight against you kill them, for that is the reward of such unbelievers. ►

وَقَٰتِلُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّذِينَ
يُقَٰتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوٓا۟ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿١٩٠﴾
وَٱقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُم مِّنْ
حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمْ ۚ وَٱلْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ ٱلْقَتْلِ ۚ
وَلَا تُقَٰتِلُوهُمْ عِندَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ حَتَّىٰ
يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ ۖ فَإِن قَٰتَلُوكُمْ فَٱقْتُلُوهُمْ ۗ
كَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٩١﴾

200. The believers are asked to fight those who hindered their efforts in the cause of God, and acted with hostility towards them merely because they sought to fashion human life according to the revealed guidance of God. Earlier, when they were weak and scattered, the Muslims were asked merely to preach and be patient with the wrongful repression meted out to them by their opponents. However, now that a small city state had been established in Madina they were commanded for the first time to unsheathe their swords against those who had resorted to armed hostility against their movement of reform. It was some time after this injunction that the Battle of Badr took place, to be followed by several other battles.

201. The believers are told that material interests should not be the motivation for their fighting, that they should not take up arms against those who were not in opposition to the true faith, that they should not resort to unscrupulous methods or to the indiscriminate killing and pillage which characterized the wars of the pre-Islamic era, the Age of Ignorance. The excesses alluded to in this verse are acts such as taking up arms against women and children, the old and the injured, mutilation of the dead bodies of the enemy, uncalled-for devastation through the destruction of fields and livestock, and other similar acts of injustice and brutality. In the Ḥadīth all these acts have been prohibited. The real intent of the verse is to stress

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(192) Then if they desist, know well that Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Compassionate.[203]

(193) Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah prevails.[204] But if they desist, then know that hostility is only against the wrong-doers.[205]

that force should be used only when its use is unavoidable, and only to the extent that is absolutely necessary.

202. Here the word *fitnah* is used in the sense of 'persecution'. It refers to a situation whereby either a person or a group is subjected to harassment and intimidation for having accepted, as true, a set of ideas contrary to those currently held, and for striving to effect reforms in the existing order of society by preaching what is good and condemning what is wrong. Such a situation must be changed, if need be, by the force of arms.

Bloodshed is bad, but when one group of people imposes its ideology and forcibly prevents others from accepting the truth, then it becomes guilty of an even more serious crime. In such circumstances, it is perfectly legitimate to remove that oppressive group by the force of arms.

203. God, in whom the believers have faith, is forgiving and ready to pardon even the worst criminals and sinners after they have renounced their arrogant defiance towards Him. It is suggested that this attribute of God should be reflected in the behaviour of the believers as well. As the saying goes: 'Mould your morals according to the attributes of God.' Hence, whenever the believers have to resort to armed conflict, they should do so not for the sake of quenching their thirst for vengeance but in the cause of God's religion. Their conflict with any group should last only as long as that group resists the cause of God. As soon as it gives up this resistance hostility should cease.

204. Here the term *fitnah* is used in a different sense from the one in which it was used above (see verse 191). It is evident from the context that *fitnah* refers here to the state of affairs wherein the object of obedience is someone other than God. Hence the purpose of a believer's fighting is that this *fitnah* should cease and obedience should be consecrated to God alone.

An investigation of the usages of the word *dīn* (which occurs in this verse) reveals that the core of its meaning is obedience. In its technical usage, the word refers to that system of life which arises as a result of a person recognizing someone as his Lord and Sovereign and committing himself to following his commands and ordinances. This explanation of the word *dīn* makes it quite clear that when some human beings establish their godhead and absolute dominance over others, this state of affairs is one of *fitnah*. Islam seeks to put an end to this and replace it by a state of affairs in which people live in obedience to the laws of God alone.

205. What is meant here by 'desisting' is not the abandonment of unbelief and polytheism on the part of the unbelievers but rather their desistance from active hostility to the religion enjoined by God. The unbeliever, the polytheist, the atheist, has each been empowered to hold on to his beliefs and to worship who and whatever he wishes. In order to deliver these people from their error, Muslims are required to counsel them and tell them where their good lies. But Muslims ought not to try to achieve this purpose by resorting to force. At the same time, these misguided people have no right to either enforce the false laws of their own contriving instead of the laws of God or to drive the people of God to bondage of others than God. In order to put an end to this *fitnah*, both persuasion and force may be used, whenever and to the extent to which each of the two is needed, and a true believer will not rest until the unbelievers give up this *fitnah*.

The statement that hostility is meant only against wrong-doers seems to imply that when the true system of life replaces the false one, ordinary people should be granted a general amnesty. At the same time, however, it would be justifiable to punish those who exceeded all limits in their hostility to the Truth, at the time when they held the reins of power. Yet in dealing with such people, it becomes the true believers, after they have won final victory, to adopt a general attitude of forgiveness and tolerance towards the vanquished rather than subject them to revenge for the wrongs they committed in the past. Those criminals whose records were exceptionally bad could, however, be punished. The Prophet (peace be on him), availed himself of this permission in respect of some notorious enemies whose hostility had exceeded all limits, even though pardon and forgiveness behoved none more than him. Thus 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'ayṭ and Naḍr b. Ḥārith from among the captives of the Battle of Badr were put to death and when a general amnesty was proclaimed after the conquest of Makka four out of seventeen persons were executed. (See Ibn Hishām, vol. 1, p. 644 and vol. 2, pp. 409 ff. – Ed.) These acts were based on the permission to put to the sword those who have been conspicuously ruthless in their hostility to Islam and the Muslims.

(194) The sacred month for the sacred month; sanctities should be respected alike (by all concerned). Thus, if someone has attacked you, attack him just as he attacked you, and fear Allah and remain conscious that Allah is with those who guard against violating the bounds set by Him.[206]

(195) Spend in the way of Allah and do not cast yourselves into destruction with your own hands;[207] do good, for Allah loves those who do good.[208]

ٱلشَّهْرُ ٱلْحَرَامُ بِٱلشَّهْرِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَٱلْحُرُمَٰتُ
قِصَاصٌ ۚ فَمَنِ ٱعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَٱعْتَدُوا۟
عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا ٱعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾
وَأَنفِقُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا۟ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ
إِلَى ٱلتَّهْلُكَةِ ۛ وَأَحْسِنُوٓا۟ ۛ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

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206. From the time of Abraham three months – Dhu al-Qa'dah, Dhu al-Ḥijjah and Muḥarram – were consecrated for *Ḥajj*, and the month of Rajab was consecrated for *'Umrah*. For the duration of these four months warfare, killing and pillage were prohibited so that people could perform Pilgrimage and return home safely. For this reason these months were called the 'sacred months'.

The purpose of the verse is to stress that if the unbelievers respect the sanctity of the sacred months, the Muslims should do the same. If, however, they violate this sanctity and subject the Muslims to aggression, then the Muslims are also entitled to retribution even during the 'sacred months'.

The permission mentioned here was called forth by the introduction of *nasī'*, a practice which had been introduced by the Arabs in order to have an advantage over others in their battles and raids. The manner in which the Arabs used *nasī'* was such that whenever they wished either to start a conflict in order to satisfy their vendetta or to loot and plunder they carried out their raid in one of the sacred months and then later on tried to compensate for this violation by treating one of the non-sacred months as a sacred month. The Muslims were, therefore, concerned as to what they should do in case the unbelievers resorted to this artifice and surprised them by an attack in one of the recognized sacred months. The verse refers to this problem.

207. 'To spend in the way of Allah' signifies financial sacrifice in order to establish God's religion. Not to make any financial sacrifice but to be

(196) Complete *Ḥajj* and '*Umrah* for Allah. And if you are prevented from doing so, then make the offering which is available to you,[209] and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its appointed place.[210] ►

وَأَتِمُّوا۟ ٱلْحَجَّ وَٱلْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ أُحْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا ٱسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ ٱلْهَدْىِ ۖ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا۟ رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ ٱلْهَدْىُ مَحِلَّهُۥ

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inclined, instead, to hold personal interests dear to one's heart will lead to one's ruin both in this world and in the Next. Allah will set the unbelievers to dominate over you in this world and condemn you in the Next world.

208. The root of the word *iḥsân* is *ḤSN*, which means doing something in a goodly manner.

One standard of conduct is merely to perform the task entrusted to one. The other and higher standard is to perform that task in a wholesome manner, to devote all one's capacities and resources to its fulfilment, to do one's duty with all one's heart. The first standard is that of ordinary obedience for which it is enough that a man should fear God. The other and higher standard is that of *iḥsân* (moral and spiritual excellence) for which it is necessary that one should have a strong love for God and a profound attachment to Him.

209. If any obstruction prevents a person from proceeding with the Pilgrimage and he is forced to stay behind, he should make a sacrificial offering to God of whatever is available – for example, either a camel, a cow, a goat or a sheep.

210. The statement: 'until the offering reaches its appointed place' has been variously interpreted by the jurists. The Ḥanafī jurists consider this to signify the area which lies within the boundaries of the *Ḥaram*. In their view this injunction means that if a man has been prevented from Pilgrimage he ought to send to the *Ḥaram* either the animal itself or the money to purchase it, and have a sacrificial offering made on his behalf. According to Mālik and al-Shāfi'ī this verse enjoins one to perform a sacrifice at the very spot where one is prevented from going any further. (See also Qurṭubī's commentary on the verse – Ed.)

The injunction regarding 'shaving the head' means that one may not have one's hair cut until a sacrificial offering has been made.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

If any of you should have to shave your head before that because of illness, or injury to the head, then you should make redemption by fasting, or almsgiving, or ritual sacrifice.[211] And when you are secure,[212] then he who takes advantage of *'Umrah* before the time of *Ḥajj* shall give the offering he can afford; and if he cannot afford the offering, shall fast for three days during *Ḥajj* and for seven days after he returns home; that is, ten days in all. This privilege is for those whose families do not live near the Holy Mosque.[213] Guard against violating these ordinances of Allah and be mindful that Allah is severe in chastisement.

فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِۦٓ أَذًى مِّن
رَّأْسِهِۦ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِّن صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ
نُسُكٍ فَإِذَآ أَمِنتُمْ فَمَن تَمَتَّعَ بِٱلْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى ٱلْحَجِّ
فَمَا ٱسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ ٱلْهَدْىِ فَمَن لَّمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ
ثَلَٰثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِى ٱلْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ
عَشَرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن لَّمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلُهُۥ
حَاضِرِى ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿١٩٦﴾

211. According to the Ḥadīth, in such a situation the Prophet (peace be on him) ordered three days of fasting, or the feeding of six poor people, or the slaughter of one sheep or goat. (See Bukhārī, 'Maghāzī', 35; Muslim, 'Ḥajj', 83 – Ed.)

212. This refers to the change in the situation when the obstacle to proceeding with the Pilgrimage has been removed. Since, in those days, the circumstances which most commonly prevented people from proceeding with their Pilgrimage was the danger of armed attack from tribes hostile to Islam, the removal of that circumstance is described by the words: 'when you are secure'. 'To become secure' refers not only to the removal of the danger of armed attack but to the removal of all such dangers.

213. In pre-Islamic Arabia it was considered a serious sin to perform *Ḥajj* and *'Umrah* in one and the same journey. According to the self-made law of the pre-Islamic Arabs, each of these Pilgrimages required a separate journey. God declared this law void for those coming from abroad and

(197) The months of *Ḥajj* are well known. Whoever intends to perform Pilgrimage in these months shall abstain from sensual indulgence,[214] wicked conduct[215] and quarrelling;[216] and whatever good you do, Allah knows it. Take your provisions for the Pilgrimage – but, in truth, the best provision is piety. Men of understanding, beware of disobeying Me.[217] ►

ٱلْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَٰتٌ ۚ فَمَن فَرَضَ
فِيهِنَّ ٱلْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ
وَلَا جِدَالَ فِى ٱلْحَجِّ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟
مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ وَتَزَوَّدُوا۟
فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ ٱلزَّادِ ٱلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَٱتَّقُونِ
يَٰٓأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٧﴾

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who were granted the privilege of performing both types of pilgrimage in the same journey. This privilege, however, was not extended to those living in the environs of Makka, within the *mīqāt*,* since it is not difficult for them to proceed separately for the major and minor Pilgrimages.

'Then you who take advantage of *'Umrah* before the time of *Ḥajj*' means that a person may perform *'Umrah* (minor Pilgrimage) and then may interrupt the state of consecration (*iḥrām*) and free himself of the prohibitions and limitations incumbent upon him in that state. Later, when the time for the *Ḥajj* (major Pilgrimage) arrives, he should once again assume the state of consecration (*iḥrām*).

214. In the state of consecration (*iḥrām*) the husband and wife are required to refrain not only from sexual intercourse but also from lascivious conversation (and, for that matter, from any act which either stems from or is likely to stimulate sexual desire – Ed.).

215. Even though all sinful acts are evil, the sinfulness of such acts is aggravated when they are committed in the state of consecration (*iḥrām*).

216. In this state it is not even permitted to rebuke one's servant.

217. In the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance it was considered an act of gross worldliness for anyone to carry provisions while on the Pilgrimage. A pious man was expected to go to the House of God without any worldly goods. This misconception is removed here and it is pointed out that abstention from carrying provisions is not necessarily an act of righteous-

► *Translation continued on next page.*

* *Mīqāt*, pl. *mawāqīt*, signifies the points which an outsider intending to perform Pilgrimage may only cross in the state of consecration (*iḥrām*) – Ed.

(198) It is no offence for you to seek the bounty of your Lord during Pilgrimage.[218] When you hasten back from 'Arafāt then remember Allah at al-Mash'ar al-Harām (i.e. al-Muzdalifah), and remember Him in the manner He has directed you, for before this you were surely in error.[219]

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَإِذَا أَفَضْتُم مِّنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِندَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ وَاذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدَاكُمْ وَإِن كُنتُم مِّن قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾

ness. True righteousness lies in the fear of God, in abstaining from violating His commands, and in leading a pure and decent life. If a pilgrim's conduct is not good and he resorts to wickedness the mere fact of not carrying provisions, thus parading his detachment from worldly goods, will do him no good. For his wickedness he will suffer humiliation both in the sight of God and man, and his action will be a desecration of the religious duty for which he undertook the journey. On the other hand, if a person's heart is full of the fear of God, and his moral conduct is good, he will be exalted by God and will be held in high esteem by human beings on his return from the Pilgrimage, regardless of the amount of provisions he carried.

218. This was another misconception entertained by the pre-Islamic Arabs. They considered it objectionable to do anything relating to one's livelihood during the Pilgrimage. In their view earning one's living was an act of pure worldliness and hence it was bad to indulge in it while engaged in the performance of a religious duty. The Qur'ān refutes this and expounds the view that if a person strives to earn his living while observing fully the laws of God his action is tantamount to seeking God's grace and bounty. (See 62: 10 – Ed.) It is no sin if a man sets out to seek God's good pleasure and during the same journey tries to combine that purpose with the quest for permissible worldly benefits.

219. The Muslims were asked to give up all those polytheistic and pagan practices that had arisen among the Arabs during the Age of Ignorance and which ran alongside the worship of God thereby adulterating the latter. They were required to consecrate their worship and adoration to God alone according to the guidance He had now revealed through the Prophet.

(199) Then press on even as others press on and implore Allah's forgiveness;[220] Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (200) And when you have performed your rites remember Allah as you remember your fathers; and remember Him even more.[221] There are some (among the ones that remember Allah) who say: 'Our Lord, grant us what is good in this world', such shall have no share in the Hereafter. ►

ثُمَّ أَفِيضُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَفَاضَ
النَّاسُ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٩٩﴾ فَإِذَا
قَضَيْتُم مَّنَاسِكَكُمْ
فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ
أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ
النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي
الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ
خَلَاقٍ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

220. Since the time of Abraham and Ishmael the recognized practice of the Arabs with regard to *Ḥajj* was that on the 9th, Dhu al-Ḥijjah, they went from Miná to 'Arafāt, returning on the morning of the 10th to stay at Muzdalifah. Later, as the priestly monopoly of the Quraysh became well established, they claimed that it was below their dignity to go to 'Arafāt with the ordinary people of Arabia. As a mark of what they called their distinction, they went to Muzdalifah only (without going to 'Arafāt) and returned from there, leaving it to the commoners to go to 'Arafāt. Subsequently Banū Khuzâ'ah, Banū Kanânah and those tribes which were linked by marriage with the Quraysh acquired the same privilege. Eventually, the status of the tribes allied to the Quraysh came to be considered higher than that of the ordinary Arabs, and these tribes too abandoned the practice of going to 'Arafāt.

It is this pride and vainglory which the present verse seeks to undermine. It is addressed to the Quraysh and the tribes associated with them either through marriage or alliance, and to all those who might be inclined to claim for themselves special privileges and distinctions in the future. Such people are asked to go to the place to which all others go, to stay with them, to return with them and to seek pardon from God for the fact that they violated the way of Abraham.

221. After the *Ḥajj* the Arabs used to hold rallies at Miná. At these rallies people from different tribes proudly narrated the achievements of their forefathers and indulged in much extravagant self-praise. Here they are asked to renounce all such things and devote the time which they formerly spent on trivialities to remembering and celebrating God.

Dhikr refers to the remembrance of God at Miná.

► *Translation continued on page 161.*

PLACES OF ḤAJJ

(201) And there are others who say: 'Our Lord, grant us what is good in this world and what is good in the World to Come, and protect us from the chastisement of the Fire.' (202) They shall have a portion from what they earned; Allah is quick in reckoning. (203) And remember Allah through the appointed days. It is no sin for him who hastens off and returns in two days, and it is no sin for him who delays the return[222] provided he has spent the days in piety. Beware of disobeying Allah and know well that to Him you all shall be mustered.

(204) Among men there is a kind whose sayings on the affairs of the world fascinate you, he calls Allah again and again to bear testimony to his sincerity;[223] yet he is most fierce in enmity.[224] ►

وَمِنْهُم مَّن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَآ ءَاتِنَا فِى
ٱلدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ
حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿٢٠١﴾
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا۟
وَٱللَّهُ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٠٢﴾
۞ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ فِىٓ أَيَّامٍ
مَّعْدُودَٰتٍ فَمَن تَعَجَّلَ فِى يَوْمَيْنِ
فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَن تَأَخَّرَ فَلَآ إِثْمَ
عَلَيْهِ لِمَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟
أَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٢٠٣﴾ وَمِنَ
ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُۥ فِى
ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهِدُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا فِى
قَلْبِهِۦ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ ٱلْخِصَامِ ﴿٢٠٤﴾

222. Whether a person returned on the 12th or on the 13th of Dhu al-Ḥijjah from Miná to Makka during the days of *tashrīq* (i.e. from the 10th to 13th of Dhu al-Ḥijjah) was immaterial. What was of real importance was not the number of days spent at Miná but the intensity of one's devotion to God during the period of one's stay.

223. Such a person tends to claim again and again that he was merely a well-wisher and was simply striving to uphold what is true and right, and to promote the welfare of the people rather than doing things for the sake of personal aggrandizement.

224. The words *aladd al-khiṣām* mean 'the most fierce in enmity'. This would apply to someone who concentrates all his energies on opposing

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(205) Whenever he attains authority,[225] he goes about the earth spreading mischief and laying to waste crops and human life, even though Allah (whose testimony he invokes) does not love mischief. (206) Whenever he is told: 'Fear Allah', his vainglory seizes him in his sin. So Hell shall suffice for him – what a wretched resting place! (207) On the other hand, among men there is a kind who dedicates his life in seeking to please Allah; and Allah is full of kindness to such devoted servants. (208) Believers! Enter wholly into Islam[226] and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan for he is your open enemy. ►

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ
فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ ٱلْحَرْثَ وَٱلنَّسْلَ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾ وَإِذَا
قِيلَ لَهُ ٱتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ ٱلْعِزَّةُ
بِٱلْإِثْمِ ۚ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۚ وَلَبِئْسَ
ٱلْمِهَادُ ﴿٢٠٦﴾ وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن
يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ٱبْتِغَآءَ مَرْضَاتِ
ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ رَءُوفٌۢ بِٱلْعِبَادِ ﴿٢٠٧﴾
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ فِي
ٱلسِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟
خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمْ
عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٠٨﴾

truth, and who resorts to whatever falsehood, dishonesty, treachery and breach of faith he thinks necessary to achieve his ends.

225. The expression *idhā tawallá* can be translated in two ways. First, in the manner of our translation of the text. It can also be translated to make the verse mean that when such people return from sweet and apparently genuine talk, they engage in arrogant and destructive action.

226. God demands that man should submit, without reservation, the whole of his being to His will. Man's outlook, intellectual pursuits, behaviour, interaction with other people and modes of endeavour should all be completely subordinate to Islam. God does not accept the splitting up of human life into separate compartments, some governed by the teachings of Islam and others exempt.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(209) And if you stumble in spite of the clear instructions which have come to you, then know well that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.[227] (210) Are those people (who are not following the right path in spite of admonition and instruction) waiting for Allah to come to them in canopies of clouds with a retinue of angels and settle the matter finally?[228] To Allah shall all matters ultimately be referred.

فَإِن زَلَلْتُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ
مَا جَآءَتْكُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتُ فَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ
ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٠٩﴾ هَلْ
يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّآ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِى ظُلَلٍ
مِّنَ ٱلْغَمَامِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَقُضِىَ
ٱلْأَمْرُ ۚ وَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ ٱلْأُمُورُ ﴿٢١٠﴾

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227. The point is that God has enormous power and knows well how to punish criminals.

228. These words are indicative of an important fact. Man's test lies in showing whether he accepts reality even though he cannot perceive it directly through his senses; and whether, after having accepted it, he has the required moral stamina to obey God even though he is endowed with the capacity to disobey Him. In sending the Prophets, in revealing the Scriptures, indeed, even in performing miracles, God has always taken care to leave scope for testing man's power of judgement and his moral stamina. He has never disclosed reality to such a degree that man would be inevitably compelled to accept it. For if that were done, nothing would remain to be tested and the very idea of man's success or failure would be meaningless.

It is pointed out, therefore, that people should not keep waiting for God and the angels – the devoted servants of His realm – to appear before them. If that were to happen, it would mark the end of everything and there would be no occasion left for man to decide anything. To believe and to bow in submission and obedience to God are of value only so long as the reality is presented in such a way as to make its rejection possible.

(211) Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs We gave them! And when a people tamper with Allah's bounty after it has been bestowed on it – then indeed Allah is severe in punishment.[229]

(212) Worldly life has been made attractive to those who have denied the Truth. Such men deride the men of faith, but the pious shall rank higher than them on the Day of Resurrection. As for worldly livelihood, Allah grants it to whomsoever He wills without measure.

سَلْ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ كَمْ ءَاتَيْنَٰهُم مِّنْ
ءَايَةٍۭ بَيِّنَةٍ ۗ وَمَن يُبَدِّلْ نِعْمَةَ ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
مَا جَآءَتْهُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿٢١١﴾
زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ۘ وَٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّقَوْا۟ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ
مَن يَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢١٢﴾

For, if the Truth were to be fully disclosed and if men were to see with their own eyes God on His Throne of Majesty with the entire universe acting according to His command, what would be the worth of their faith and obedience? If all these things were physically observable not even the most stubborn unbelievers and the worst sinners would dare either to disbelieve or disobey. Acceptance of faith and obedience has value only as long as there remains a veil over reality. The moment when reality is totally unveiled would mark the end of the period granted to man to decide, and of the testing period for him. It would, in fact, be the Day of Judgement.

229. There are two reasons why this query is addressed to the Children of Israel. In the first place, a group of living human beings provide a better source of instruction and admonition than mute archaeological findings. In the second place, the Israelites were a people who, having been endowed with Scripture and prophethood, were entrusted with the leadership of the world. By falling prey to worldliness, hypocrisy and other errors of belief and conduct they subsequently lost God's favour. A people entrusted with the task of universal leadership could derive no better lesson from another people than this one.

(213) In the beginning mankind followed one single way. (Later on this state ended and differences arose.) Then Allah sent forth Prophets as heralds of good tidings for the righteous and as warners against the consequences of evil-doing. He sent down with them the Book embodying the Truth so that it might judge between people in their disputes. And those who innovated divergent ways rather than follow the Truth were none other than those who had received the knowledge of the Truth and clear guidance; and they did so to commit excesses against each other.[230] Thus Allah directed, by His leave, those who have come to believe (in the Prophets) to the right way in matters on which they disagreed. Allah guides whomsoever He wills onto a straight way.

كَانَ ٱلنَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ ٱللَّهُ
ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنزَلَ
مَعَهُمُ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ
ٱلنَّاسِ فِيمَا ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ ۚ وَمَا ٱخْتَلَفَ
فِيهِ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ بَغْيًۢا بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ
فَهَدَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لِمَا ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟
فِيهِ مِنَ ٱلْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَهْدِى
مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢١٣﴾

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230. When ignorant people attempt to trace the history of 'religion' they tend to the view that man began his life in the darkness of polytheism and that in the course of time, corresponding to man's progress, this darkness gradually receded and light increased till man arrived at monotheism.

The Qur'ānic version, however, proclaims that man began his life in full light of the Truth. God revealed this Truth to the very first man He created, one to whom He intimated the right way of life for man. Thereafter the human race remained on the Right Way for some time and lived as one community. Later, however, people invented deviating ways. This did not happen because Truth had not been communicated to them. The cause was rather that some people wilfully sought to acquire privileges, benefits and advantages beyond their legitimate limits, and thus subjected others

(214) Do you suppose[231] that you will enter Paradise untouched by the suffering endured by the men of faith who passed away before you? They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were so convulsed that the Messenger and the believers with him cried out: 'When will Allah's help arrive?' They were assured that Allah's help was close by.

(215) People ask you what they should spend. Say: 'Whatever wealth you spend let it be for your parents and kinsmen, the orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; Allah is aware of whatever good you do.'

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا
يَأْتِكُم مَّثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِن قَبْلِكُم
مَّسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّىٰ
يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ
نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٢١٤﴾
يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلْ
مَا أَنفَقْتُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَالِدَيْنِ
وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ
وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١٥﴾

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to injustices. It was in order to enable people to overcome this corruption that God sent His Prophets. These Prophets were not sent to found separate religions in their own names and bring new religious communities into existence. Rather the purpose of the Prophets was to illuminate before people the Truth which they had allowed to be lost, and once again make them into one community.

231. In between this verse and the one above comes a whole story which has been left untold, a story which is alluded to in the present verse and which is mentioned in some detail in the Makkan *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān (these were revealed earlier than the present *sūrah*). The point emphasized here is that whenever the Prophets came into the world they, and their followers, were confronted with severe resistance from those in rebellion against God. At grave risk to themselves they strove to establish the hegemony of the true religion over the false ways of life. To follow this religion has, therefore, never been easy; it is not merely a matter of declaring one's faith and then sitting back in ease and comfort. On the contrary, the profession of faith has always demanded that one should strive to establish the religion, which one has adopted as one's faith, as a living reality and that one should spare no effort in undermining the power of the Devil who seeks to resist it.

(216) Fighting is ordained upon you and it is disliked by you; it may well be that you dislike a thing even though it is good for you, and it may well be that you like a thing even though it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.

(217) People ask you about fighting in the holy month. Say: 'Fighting in it is an awesome sin, but barring people from the way of Allah, disbelieving in Allah, and denying entry into the Holy Mosque and expelling its inmates from it[232] are more awesome acts in the sight of Allah; and persecution is even more heinous than killing. ►

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهٌ
لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ
خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَن تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا
وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ
لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١٦﴾ يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ
الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ قِتَالٌ
فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِندَ اللَّهِ
وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ

232. This relates to a certain incident. In Rajab 2 A.H. the Prophet sent an expedition of eight persons to Nakhlah (which lies between Makka and Ṭā'if). He directed them to follow the movements of the Quraysh and gather information about their plans, but not to engage in fighting. On their way they came across a trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh and ambushed it. They killed one person and captured the rest along with their belongings and took them to Madina. They did this at a time when the month of Rajab was approaching its end and Sha'bān was about to begin. It was, therefore, doubtful whether the attack was actually carried out in one of the sacred months, that is, Rajab, or not. But the Quraysh, and the Jews who were secretly in league with them, as well as the hypocrites made great play of this and used it as a weapon in their propaganda campaign against the Muslims. (For this expedition see Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. I, pp. 601 ff; Ibn Isḥāq, *Life of Muḥammad*, tr. A. Guillaume, pp. 286 ff.) They pointed out the contradiction between the claims of the Muslims to true religion on the one hand, and their not hesitating to shed blood in a sacred month on the other.

This verse aims to answer these objections. The essence of what is said here is that fighting during the sacred months is without doubt an evil act. It points out that those people who had continually subjected their kith

► *Translation continued on next page.*

They will not cease fighting against you till they turn you from your religion if they can.[233] (So remember well) that whoever turns away from his religion and dies in the state of unbelief their work will go to waste in this world and in the Next. Such men are destined for the Fire and it is there that they will abide.	وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَـٰتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَن دِينِكُمْ إِنِ ٱسْتَطَـٰعُوا۟ ۚ وَمَن يَرْتَدِدْ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِۦ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَـٰلُهُمْ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَـٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَـٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

and kin to untold wrong for thirteen years merely because they believed in the One God were not competent to make such an objection. Not only had the Muslims been driven from their homes, they had had the way to the Holy Mosque closed to them, a bar which had not been imposed by anyone during the course of some two thousand years. With this record of mischief and misconduct it was not for them to raise such an outcry at a minor ambush, and especially so when the incident had taken place without the approval of the Prophet. The whole incident was in fact no more than an irresponsible act on the part of some members of the Islamic community.

It should be remembered that when on their return those people went, with captives and booty, to visit the Prophet, he expressly pointed out to them that he had not permitted them to fight. Not only that, he declined to receive the public exchequer's share of their booty, which indicated that their booty was considered unlawful. The Muslims, in general, also severely reproached the people responsible for the incident, and in fact nobody in Madina applauded what they had done.

233. A few simple-hearted Muslims, whose minds were seized by a mistaken concept of righteousness and pacifism, were influenced by the above objections which had been raised by the polytheists of Makka and the Jews. In this verse the believers are being asked not to entertain the hope that they might clear the air and promote understanding and goodwill by adopting an over-lenient stance towards their opponents. The objections of the latter were not motivated by the desire to find out the Truth; their true purpose was nothing but vilification. What particularly irked the adversaries of the Muslims was that they believed in a religion of their own and were inviting the whole world to accept it. Hence, as long as the Muslims continued to believe in Islam and as long as their opponents remained stubborn in their disbelief, the existing chasm between the two groups was bound to remain.

(218) (On the contrary) those who believed, and forsook their hearth and home, and strove[234] in the way of Allah, such may rightly hope for the mercy of Allah: for Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

(219) They ask you about wine and games of chance. Say: 'In both these there is great evil; even though there is some benefit for men, their evil is greater than their benefit.'[235]

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُواْ
وَجَٰهَدُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ
يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ ٱللَّهِۚ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ
رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢١٨﴾ ۞ يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ
ٱلْخَمْرِ وَٱلْمَيْسِرِۖ قُلْ فِيهِمَآ إِثْمٌ
كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَٰفِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَآ
أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَاۗ

Moreover, the enemies whom they confronted were not to be considered ordinary enemies. Those who wanted to deprive a person of his belongings or land were in fact enemies of a relatively much less dangerous kind than those who sought to turn him away from his faith; while the former sought to harm his worldly interests, the latter were bent upon hurling him into the eternal torment in the Hereafter.

234. *Jihād* denotes doing one's utmost to achieve something. It is not the equivalent of war, for which the Arabic word is *qitāl*. *Jihād* has a wider connotation and embraces every kind of striving in God's cause. A *mujāhid* is a person who is single-mindedly devoted to his cause, who uses his mental capacity to reflect how best he can achieve it, propagates it by word of mouth and by the pen, uses his physical energy in striving to serve it, spends all the resources at his disposal to promote it, employs all the force he commands in confronting any power which might stand in its way, and, whenever necessary, does not shirk risking his very life for it. All this is *jihād*. '*Jihād* in the way of God' is that strife in which man engages exclusively to win God's good pleasure, to establish the supremacy of His religion and to make His word prevail.

235. This is the first injunction concerning intoxicating drinks and gambling, and here the matter has been left merely as an expression of disapproval. This was a preliminary step designed to prepare the minds of people for the acceptance of their prohibition. The injunction prohibiting the performance of Prayer when in a state of intoxication came later, and ultimately alcohol, gambling and the like were categorically prohibited (see 4: 43 and 5: 90).

They ask: 'What should we spend in the way of Allah?' Say: 'Whatever you can spare.' In this way Allah clearly expounds His injunctions to you that you may reflect upon them, (220) both in regard to this world and the Next.

They question you concerning orphans. Say: 'To deal with them in the way which is to their good, that is best.[236] And if you intermix (your expenses and living) with them, (there is no harm for) they are your brothers.' Allah knows the mischievous from the righteous, and had Allah willed, He would indeed have imposed on you exacting conditions, but He is All-Powerful as well as All-Wise.

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلِ ٱلْعَفْوَ ۗ
كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَٰتِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١٩﴾ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۗ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ ۖ
قُلْ إِصْلَاحٌ لَّهُمْ خَيْرٌ ۖ وَإِن تُخَالِطُوهُمْ
فَإِخْوَٰنُكُمْ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ ٱلْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ
ٱلْمُصْلِحِ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَأَعْنَتَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

236. Before this verse was revealed many severe injunctions had already been revealed regarding the protection of orphans' property. It had been ordained that 'people should not even draw near to the property of the orphan' (6: 152; 17: 34) and that 'those who wrongfully eat the properties of orphans only fill their bellies with fire' (4: 10). Because of these severe injunctions the orphans' guardians were so overawed that they even separated the food and drink of the orphans from their own; they felt anxious lest anything belonging to the orphans became mixed with their own. It is for this reason that they enquired of the Prophet (peace be on him) what the proper form of their dealings with orphans should be.

(221) Marry not the women who associate others with Allah in His divinity until they believe; for a believing slave-girl is better than a (free, respectable) woman who associates others with Allah in His divinity, even though she might please you. Likewise, do not give your women in marriage to men who associate others with Allah in His divinity until they believe; for a believing slave is better than a (free, respectable) man who associates others with Allah in His divinity, even though he might please you. Such people call you towards the Fire,[237] and Allah calls you, by His leave, towards Paradise and forgiveness; and He makes His injunctions clear to people so that they may take heed.

وَلَا تَنكِحُوا۟ ٱلْمُشْرِكَٰتِ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنَّ
وَلَأَمَةٌ مُّؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّن مُّشْرِكَةٍ
وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تُنكِحُوا۟
ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ ۚ وَلَعَبْدٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ
خَيْرٌ مِّن مُّشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ ۗ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
يَدْعُونَ إِلَى ٱلنَّارِ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ يَدْعُوٓا۟ إِلَى
ٱلْجَنَّةِ وَٱلْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۖ وَيُبَيِّنُ
ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ٢٢١

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237. This is the reason for, and the wisdom underlying the injunction mentioned above prohibiting marriage links with polytheists. Marriage does not consist merely of sexual relations between a man and a woman. It is a relationship which has deep social, moral and emotional implications. If established between a believer and a polytheist, this kind of relationship has many possible outcomes. On the one hand, it is possible that because of the influence of the believing spouse, the other partner, the family and the future generations may become receptive to Islamic beliefs and to the Islamic way of life. On the other hand, it is also possible that the spouse who is a polytheist may influence the thinking and mode of living of the believing spouse, the family and the future generations. Moreover this relationship may promote in that family a hotch-potch of Islam, downright atheism, and polytheism which, however welcome to non-Muslims, is in no way acceptable to Islam. No true believer can run the risk that either the ideas and life-styles which are organically related to atheism and polytheism

(222) They ask you about menstruation. Say: 'It is a state of impurity;[238] so keep away from them and do not approach them till they are cleansed.[239] And when they are cleansed, then come to them as Allah has commanded you.'[240] Truly, Allah loves those who abstain from evil and keep themselves pure. (223) Your wives are your tilth; go, then, into your tilth as you wish[241] but take heed of your ultimate future[242] and avoid incurring the wrath of Allah. Know well that one Day you shall face Him. Announce good tidings to the believers.

وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْمَحِيضِ قُلْ هُوَ
أَذًى فَٱعْتَزِلُوا۟ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فِى ٱلْمَحِيضِ
وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ
فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يُحِبُّ ٱلتَّوَّٰبِينَ وَيُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ
﴿٢٢٢﴾ نِسَآؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَّكُمْ فَأْتُوا۟ حَرْثَكُمْ
أَنَّىٰ شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا۟ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ وَٱتَّقُوا۟
ٱللَّهَ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّكُم مُّلَٰقُوهُ
وَبَشِّرِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٢٣﴾

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may flourish among the members of his family, or that some aspect of his own life may bear the impress of atheism or polytheism.

238. The Arabic word *adha* denotes both a state of ritual impurity and sickness. Menstruation is not merely an impurity, but also a state in which the woman is closer to sickness than to health.

239. With regard to matters such as these the Qur'ān resorts to metaphors and figurative language. Hence it instructs men not to approach women. This does not mean that people should either abstain from sitting together on the same floor or eating together when a woman has her monthly period making her virtually an untouchable, as has been the custom among the Jews, Hindus and certain other nations. The explanation of this injunction by the Prophet makes it clear that during this period men are only required to abstain from sexual intercourse; no change is postulated in other relationships, and the woman is to be treated in the normal way. (See, for instance, Bukhārī, 'Ḥayḍ', 10, 'I'tikāf', 2–4, 10, 19; Muslim, 'Ḥayḍ', 6–13; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṭahārah', 102, 106 – Ed.)

240. The 'command' of God mentioned here is not a formal legal injunction from God, but that inherent urge with which the nature of both men and animals has been imbued and which is apprehended instinctively.

(224) Do not swear by Allah in your oaths if they are intended to hinder you from virtue, piety and promoting the good of mankind.[243] Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (225) Allah will not take you to task for the oaths you utter in vain,[244] but will certainly take you to task for the oaths you utter in earnest. Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا اللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَتُصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٤﴾ لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٥﴾

(The verse means, therefore, that after the end of the menstrual course people may again engage in sexual intercourse – Ed.)

241. That is, God's purpose in the creation of women is not merely to provide men with recreation. Their mutual relationship is like that between a farmer and his tilth. A farmer approaches his field not just for the sake of pleasure, but to acquire produce. Similarly, man ought to approach the tilth of the human race with the purpose of acquiring produce, that is, offspring. What is of concern to the Law of God is not the particular mode of cultivating one's tilth, but rather that one should go only to one's tilth and not elsewhere, and that one should go there for the purpose of cultivation.

242. These words are susceptible to two meanings. First, that a person should try to maintain the continuity of the human race so that when he departs from this world there should be others to replace him in his tasks. Second, that one should be concerned with the quality of the coming generation, i.e., how far it is endowed with religious devotion, moral excellence and humanity, and that one should do all that is possible to promote these qualities. The latter part of the verse contains the warning that those who deliberately neglect these two duties will be severely taken to task by God.

243. Authentic Traditions indicate that if a person takes a vow and discovers later that righteousness and common good are best served by breaking that vow then he should do so. Expiation consists in either feeding or providing clothes for ten poor people, or setting free a slave, or fasting for three days (see 5: 89).

(226) For those who vow abstinence from their wives there is a respite of four months.[245] Then, if they go back on their vow they will find that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.[246] (227) And if they resolve on divorce,[247] surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.[248]

لِّلَّذِينَ يُؤْلُونَ مِن نِّسَآئِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍ فَإِن فَآءُو فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٦﴾ وَإِنْ عَزَمُوا۟ ٱلطَّلَٰقَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

244. This refers to oaths which one utters either through habit or without any intent and purpose. The breach of such vows neither entails expiation nor makes man liable to God's reproach.

245. In the legal terminology of Islam this is known as *īlā'*. It is obvious that harmony and cordiality do not always prevail in matrimonial life. There are occasions when strains and tensions develop, leading to discord and estrangement. But the Law of God does not approve of that discord which causes a husband and wife, who are legally tied to one another in matrimony, to remain for all practical purposes alienated from one another as if they had ceased to be spouses. For this kind of abnormal discord and estrangement God has fixed a limit of four months during which the spouses are required either to settle their difference, or to break the tie of wedlock so that each becomes free to contract marriage with someone with whom a harmonious matrimonial relationship appears more likely.

Since the verse mentions 'taking a vow', the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī jurists consider the injunction to be applicable only when a husband has taken a vow not to have sexual relations with his wife. According to them, the injunction does not apply if the husband merely forsakes sexual relations with his wife without taking any vow to that effect. The Mālikī jurists are, however, of the opinion that irrespective of whether a person has taken a vow, the maximum permissible limit for abstaining from sexual relations in wedlock is four months. A statement to that effect is also attributed to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. (See Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, vol. 2, pp. 98 ff. – Ed.)

According to 'Alī, Ibn Abbās and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, this injunction is related to the cessation of sexual relations as a result of unpleasantness in the relationship of the spouses. It would not apply, however, if a husband were to decide to abandon sexual relations with his wife out of some

beneficial consideration – say because the wife is breastfeeding – at a time when their relationship was pleasant. According to other jurists, however, any vow which prevents sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is *īlā'*, and ought not to last longer than four months irrespective of the state of the matrimonial relationship when it was taken. (See Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 355 f. – Ed.)

246. Some jurists have interpreted this verse to signify that if the spouses break their vow and re-establish sexual relations they will not be liable to any expiation and will be pardoned by God gratuitously. However, the majority of jurists are of the opinion that they are required to expiate. The statement that God is Oft-Forgiving and Merciful does not mean that God has forgiven them. It means rather that God will accept their expiation and will forgive them for whatever excesses they may have committed against each other.

247. According to 'Uthmān, Ibn Mas'ūd, Zayd ibn Thābit and others the limit for the restoration of matrimonial relations is four months. The mere termination of that period proves that the husband has decided to repudiate the marriage and so divorce automatically ensues. It will be reckoned as an irrevocable (*bā'in*) repudiation. This means that separation between the spouses will come into force and the husband will not have the right to revoke it during the period of waiting (*'iddah*). The two parties will, however, have the right to recontract marriage by mutual consent. Statements from 'Umar, 'Alī, Ibn 'Abbās, and also a statement from Ibn 'Umar, have been reported in support of this doctrine and have been accepted by the Ḥanafī jurists as the basis of their doctrine.

Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib, Makḥūl, Zuhrī, and some other early jurists agree with this doctrine to the extent that divorce comes into force after four months. But they consider that the husband may revoke it during the period of waiting; and even after the lapse of that period the spouses may recontract marriage by mutual consent.

However, 'Ā'ishah, Abū al-Dardā' and the majority of the jurists of Madina are opposed to this opinion and hold that after four months the matter should be placed before the court when the judge will order the husband either to resume matrimonial relations with his wife or divorce her. Statements from 'Umar and 'Alī as well as a statement from Ibn 'Umar have come down in support of this doctrine. This opinion has been accepted by Mālik and Shāfi'ī. (See Jaṣṣāṣ, vol. 1, pp. 359 f. – Ed.)

248. That is, if a man has abandoned his wife on unreasonable grounds, he should not feel secure from the wrath of God for He is not unaware of the excesses that he may have committed.

(228) Divorced women shall keep themselves in waiting for three menstrual courses and it is unlawful for them, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day, to hide whatever Allah might have created in their wombs. Should their husbands desire reconciliation during this time they are entitled to take them back into wedlock.[249]

In a fair manner women have the same rights against their men as men have against them; but men have a degree above them. Allah is All-Powerful, All-Wise.

(229) Divorce can be pronounced twice: then, either honourable retention or kindly release should follow.[250]

وَٱلْمُطَلَّقَٰتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ
ثَلَٰثَةَ قُرُوٓءٍ ۚ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَن يَكْتُمْنَ
مَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ فِىٓ أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِن كُنَّ يُؤْمِنَّ
بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ۚ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ
فِى ذَٰلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوٓا۟ إِصْلَٰحًا ۚ وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ
ٱلَّذِى عَلَيْهِنَّ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ
دَرَجَةٌ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٨﴾ ٱلطَّلَٰقُ
مَرَّتَانِ ۖ فَإِمْسَاكٌۢ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌۢ
بِإِحْسَٰنٍ

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249. Jurists disagree about the legal import of this verse. According to some, as long as a woman has not completed her third menstrual period repudiation will not have the effect of irrevocable divorce. This is the view of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Alī, Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, Ibn Mas'ūd and several distinguished Companions of the Prophet. This is also the accepted doctrine of the Ḥanafī jurists. On the other hand, another group of jurists is of the view that, as soon as the third monthly period of a woman begins, the husband ceases to have the right to revoke the divorce. This is the view of 'Ā'ishah, Ibn 'Umar and Zayd ibn Thābit, and has been accepted by the Shāfi'ī and Mālikī jurists. It should be clear, however, that this injunction is applicable only when the husband has pronounced single or double divorce. In case of triple divorce, the husband ceases to have the right of revocation. (See Jaṣṣāṣ, vol. 1, pp. 364 ff. – Ed.)

250. This little verse aims at the reform of a serious evil that was rampant in the social life in pre-Islamic Arabia. According to the customary law of

(While dissolving the marriage tie) it is unlawful for you to take back anything of what you have given to your wives[251] unless both fear that they may not be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah. Then, if they fear that they might not be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah, there is no blame upon them for what the wife might give away of their property to become released from the marriage tie.[252] These are the bounds set by Allah; do not transgress them. Those of you who transgress the bounds set by Allah are indeed the wrong-doers.

وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَن تَأْخُذُوا مِمَّا
آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَن يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا
حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ
اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ
حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَن يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ
اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٢٢٩﴾

Arabia, a person was entitled to pronounce any number of divorces upon his wife. As a result divorce was resorted to at the least provocation and annoyance. In addition, the husband often exercised his right to revoke the divorce he had pronounced with the result that the poor wife could neither live with him in happiness nor free herself to contract a fresh marriage with someone else. Here the Qur'ān seeks to shut the door on this injustice. According to this verse, a man may pronounce revocable divorce upon his wife not more than twice. Should he pronounce divorce for the third time after revoking it twice, the wife will be permanently alienated from him.

The appropriate procedure for divorce, according to the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, is that a person should pronounce one divorce outside the time of the wife's menstrual period. After the first divorce he may pronounce a second in the next clear period if he wants to, though it is preferable that he should confine himself to pronouncing the first. In this case the husband retains the right to revoke the divorce at any time before the lapse of the period of waiting (*'iddah*); even if the period of waiting has lapsed, the couple have the right to recontract the marriage by mutual consent. If the husband, however, pronounces divorce in his wife's third clear period

he has no right to revoke the divorce, and the spouses are not entitled to recontract the marriage. The pronouncing of triple divorce in one session is a highly sinful act according to the Law, and the Prophet has strongly denounced it. (See Nasā'ī, 'Ṭalāq', 6 – Ed.) It has even been established that 'Umar used to flog those who pronounced triple divorce in one session. Although this procedure of divorce is considered sinful, the founders of the four legal schools consider it to have legal effect, with the result that such divorce, in their view, becomes absolutely irrevocable.

251. This refers to the *mahr* (bridal gift) and the jewellery, clothes and so on which the husband offers as a gift to his wife, and to which he has no right of reclaim. It is, indeed, normally inconsistent with Islamic ethics that a person should reclaim anything he has made over to another by way of donation or gift. In the Ḥadīth this disgraceful act is likened to a dog licking its own vomit. (See Bukhārī, 'Hibah', 30; Nasā'ī, 'Hibah', 3, etc. – Ed.) In the case of a husband, in particular, it is a matter of the utmost disgrace that, at the time of saying farewell to his divorced wife he should try to dispossess her of what he had once given her out of his own goodwill. On the contrary, the morals that Islam seeks to cultivate require that at the time of parting the husband ought to present her with a farewell gift. (See verse 241 below.)

252. In the terminology of Islamic Law this is known as *khul'*, i.e. a woman's securing the annulment of her marriage through the payment of some compensation to her husband. Whatever settlement is made between a husband and wife should come into effect. If the matter is referred to the court, however, it will investigate only whether the wife has really become too disgusted with the husband to put up with him. (For the Traditions on the basis of which the author concludes this see the commentaries on this verse in Ibn Kathīr and Qurṭubī, see especially the latter, vol. 2, pp. 946–8 – Ed.) Once this is determined the court is entitled to fix the amount of payment incumbent on the wife as compensation for the repudiation of her marriage, and the husband will be bound to accept that amount and divorce his wife. In general, the jurists believe that the payment, thus fixed, should not be higher than the original *mahr* paid by the husband.

The divorce that comes into effect is irrevocable and brings separation into effect immediately. Since the woman has paid compensation, she has in effect purchased the right of repudiation and the husband, therefore, has ceased to have the right to revoke the divorce. If, however, the spouses agree to recontract marriage, they may do so.

According to the majority of jurists the period of waiting under *khul'* is the same as under divorce. However, there are several Traditions in Abū Dā'ūd, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, etc., which show that the Prophet fixed the period of waiting at one menstrual period, and that 'Uthmān applied this in a case which he decided. (See Ibn Kathīr's commentary on the verse.)

(230) Then, if he divorces her (for the third time, after pronouncing the divorce twice), she shall not be lawful to him unless she first takes another man for a husband, and he divorces her.[253] There is no blame upon them if both of them return to one another thereafter, provided they think that they will be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah. These are the bounds of Allah which He makes clear to a people who have knowledge (of the consequences of violating those bounds).

(231) And so, when you divorce women and they reach the end of their waiting term, then either retain them in a fair manner or let them go in a fair manner. And do not retain them to their hurt or by way of transgression; whosoever will do that will indeed wrong himself.[254] ►

فَإِن طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُۥ مِنۢ بَعۡدُ حَتَّىٰ
تَنكِحَ زَوۡجًا غَيۡرَهُۥۗ فَإِن طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيۡهِمَآ أَن يَتَرَاجَعَآ إِن ظَنَّآ أَن يُقِيمَا
حُدُودَ ٱللَّهِۗ وَتِلۡكَ حُدُودُ ٱللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا
لِقَوۡمٖ يَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٠﴾ وَإِذَا طَلَّقۡتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ
فَبَلَغۡنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمۡسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعۡرُوفٍ
أَوۡ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعۡرُوفٖۚ وَلَا تُمۡسِكُوهُنَّ
ضِرَارٗا لِّتَعۡتَدُواْۚ وَمَن يَفۡعَلۡ ذَٰلِكَ فَقَدۡ
ظَلَمَ نَفۡسَهُۥۚ

253. It is known from authentic Traditions that it is totally illegitimate for a person to arrange the marriage of his divorced wife with someone else on the understanding that the latter wil divorce her to make it possible for the former husband to recontract marriage with that woman. Such trickery would in fact be an act of sheer sexual corruption and would not render the woman liable to remarriage with her former husband. According to a Tradition transmitted from 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, Abū Hurayrah and 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir, the Prophet pronounced his curse on those who arrange, as well as on those who agree to contract, such fictitious marriages. (See Muslim, 'Ṭalāq', 15, 71; Nasā'ī, 'Ṭalāq', 8; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 314 and vol. 5, p. 334; Al-Muwaṭṭa', 'Ṭalāq', 27; Abū Dā'ūd, 'Ṭalāq', 10 – Ed.)

► *Translation continued on next page.*

Do not take the signs of Allah in jest and remember Allah's favour upon you. He admonishes you to revere the Book and the Wisdom that He has sent down upon you.[255] Fear Allah, and know well that Allah has full knowledge of everything.

(232) When you divorce women and they have completed their waiting term do not hinder them from marrying other men if they have agreed to this in a fair manner.[256] ►

وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوٓا۟ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ هُزُوًا ۚ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟
نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنَ
ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَٱلْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُم بِهِۦ ۚ
وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣١﴾ وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَبَلَغْنَ
أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَن يَنكِحْنَ
أَزْوَٰجَهُنَّ إِذَا تَرَٰضَوْا۟ بَيْنَهُم بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ

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254. It is absolutely improper that a person should revoke the divorce he pronounced on his wife before the lapse of the period of waiting merely in order to use this revocation as a pretext to harass and torment her. God commands that if a person revokes the divorce this decision should be prompted by a sincere desire to live together amicably. Should that intention be lacking, it is better to part company in a graceful manner (see further n. 250 above).

255. Muslims should not forget that by teaching them the Book and Wisdom, God entrusted them with the glorious task of guiding the world. They should also not forget that they were appointed the 'community of the middle way' and appointed as witnesses to good and righteousness (see verse 143 above). It does not become them, therefore, to indulge in sophistry and to play with the verses of the Book of God, to exploit the words of the Law to their advantage in achieving ends counter to its spirit, and to slump into injustice and other evil behaviour instead of directing the world to the Right Way.

256. This is a directive to the relatives of the divorced woman. When a woman is divorced by her husband and he fails to revoke the divorce before the expiry of the waiting period, the relatives of the woman should not try to prevent the couple from re-marrying if they agree to do so. This verse may also be interpreted to mean that if a divorced woman wants to contract marriage with someone other than her former husband after the expiry of the waiting period, the former husband should not obstruct this marriage by making malicious propaganda against the woman he has forsaken.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

That is an admonition to every one of you who believes in Allah and the Last Day; that is a cleaner and purer way for you. For Allah knows whereas you do not know.

(233) If they (i.e. the fathers) wish that the period of suckling for their children be completed, mothers may suckle their children for two whole years.[257] (In such a case) it is incumbent upon him who has begotten the child to provide them (i.e. divorced women) their sustenance and clothing in a fair manner. But none shall be burdened with more than he is able to bear; neither shall a mother suffer because of her child nor shall the father be made to suffer because he has begotten him. The same duty toward the suckling mother rests upon the heir[258] as upon him (i.e. the father).

ذَٰلِكَ يُوعَظُ بِهِۦ مَن كَانَ مِنكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ
بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ ۗ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ
وَأَطْهَرُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٢﴾
۞ وَٱلْوَٰلِدَٰتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَٰدَهُنَّ
حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ ۖ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَن يُتِمَّ
ٱلرَّضَاعَةَ ۚ وَعَلَى ٱلْمَوْلُودِ لَهُۥ رِزْقُهُنَّ
وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ
إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَا تُضَآرَّ وَٰلِدَةٌۢ بِوَلَدِهَا
وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَّهُۥ بِوَلَدِهِۦ ۚ وَعَلَى ٱلْوَارِثِ
مِثْلُ ذَٰلِكَ ۗ

257. This injunction applies to the condition where the couple have separated either because of divorce, or *khul'* (see n. 252 above), or *faskh* (annulment) or *tafrīq* (repudiation as a result of judicial decision) and the woman is nursing a child.

258. That is, if the father dies, whoever replaces him as the guardian of the child will be responsible for fulfilling this claim.

And if both (the parents) decide, by mutual consent and consultation, to wean the child, there is no blame on them; if you decide to have other women suckle your children there is no blame upon you, provided you hand over its compensation in a fair manner. Fear Allah and know well that Allah sees all that you do.

(234) The wives of men who have died must observe a waiting period of four months and ten days;[259] when they have reached the end of the waiting term, there is no blame on you regarding what they may do with themselves in a fair manner. Allah is well aware of what you do.

فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَن تَرَاضٍ مِّنْهُمَا
وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ أَرَدتُّمْ أَن
تَسْتَرْضِعُوٓا أَوْلَٰدَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا
سَلَّمْتُم مَّآ ءَاتَيْتُم بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَٱتَّقُوا ٱللَّهَ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓا أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٣﴾
وَٱلَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ
أَزْوَٰجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ
أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا
جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِنَّ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٤﴾

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259. The waiting period owing to the death of the husband is obligatory even for a woman with whom consummation of marriage has not taken place. A pregnant woman, however, is exempted from this. Her waiting period expires with childbirth, irrespective of whether the time between the husband's death and the childbirth is less than the waiting period prescribed by Law.

'To observe a waiting period' does not mean merely that they should refrain from marrying, but also from self-adornment.

Hence we find categorical directives in the Ḥadīth that a widow should neither wear colourful and showy dresses and jewellery, make use of henna, kohl, and perfumes, nor set her hair in an attractive style. There is disagreement, however, as to whether the widow may go out of her house during the waiting period. 'Umar, 'Uthmān, Ibn 'Umar, Zayd ibn Thābit, Ibn Mas'ūd, Umm Salamah, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn and the founders of the four legal schools are of the opinion that during the waiting period a woman should stay in the house in which her husband died. During the daytime she may go out to do necessary errands, but her residence should be her own home. On the

(235) There is no blame on you whether you hint at a marriage proposal to such women or keep the proposal hidden in your heart. Allah knows that you will think of them in that connection. But do not make any secret engagement with them and speak openly in an honourable manner. Do not resolve on the marriage tie until the ordained term has come to its end. Know well that Allah knows even what is in your heart. So, beware of Him and know well that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

(236) There is no blame upon you if you divorce your wives before you have touched them or settled a bridal gift upon them. But even in this case you should make some provision for them:[260] the affluent, according to his means; the straitened, according to his means – a provision in fair manner. That is a duty upon the good-doers. ►

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُم بِهِۦ
مِنْ خِطْبَةِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ أَوْ أَكْنَنتُمْ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِكُمْ ۚ عَلِمَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ
سَتَذْكُرُونَهُنَّ وَلَٰكِن
لَّا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّآ أَن تَقُولُوا۟
قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا ۚ وَلَا تَعْزِمُوا۟ عُقْدَةَ
ٱلنِّكَاحِ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ ٱلْكِتَٰبُ أَجَلَهُۥ ۚ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِىٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ
فَٱحْذَرُوهُ ۚ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ
حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣٥﴾ لَّا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِن طَلَّقْتُمُ
ٱلنِّسَآءَ مَا لَمْ تَمَسُّوهُنَّ أَوْ تَفْرِضُوا۟ لَهُنَّ
فَرِيضَةً ۚ وَمَتِّعُوهُنَّ عَلَى ٱلْمُوسِعِ قَدَرُهُۥ
وَعَلَى ٱلْمُقْتِرِ قَدَرُهُۥ مَتَٰعًۢا بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۖ
حَقًّا عَلَى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٢٣٦﴾

contrary, 'Ā'ishah, Ibn 'Abbās, 'Alī, Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, 'Aṭā', Ṭā'ūs, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Ẓāhirīs are of the opinion that a widow may spend her waiting period wherever she likes, and may even go on journeys. (See the commentary on the verse in Jaṣṣāṣ, vol. 1, pp. 418 f. – Ed.)

260. This sundering of the matrimonial contract after it has been concluded does cause some harm to the woman; God has ordered,

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(237) And if you divorce them before you touch them or settle a bridal gift upon them, then (give them) half of what you have settled unless either the women act leniently and forgo their claim, or he in whose hand is the marriage tie acts leniently (and pays the full amount). If you act leniently, it is closer to being God-fearing. And forget not to act gracefully with one another,[261] for indeed Allah sees all that you do.

(238) Be watchful over the Prayers,[262] and over praying with the utmost excellence,[263] and stand before Allah as would utterly obedient servants.

وَإِن طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَمَسُّوهُنَّ
وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ
مَا فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّآ أَن يَعْفُونَ أَوْ يَعْفُوَاْ
ٱلَّذِى بِيَدِهِۦ عُقْدَةُ ٱلنِّكَاحِ ۚ وَأَن
تَعْفُوٓاْ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ
وَلَا تَنسَوُاْ ٱلْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٧﴾ حَٰفِظُواْ عَلَى
ٱلصَّلَوَٰتِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِ ٱلْوُسْطَىٰ
وَقُومُواْ لِلَّهِ قَٰنِتِينَ ﴿٢٣٨﴾

therefore, that the person concerned should compensate for the loss according to his capacity.

261. Magnanimity in dealings is essential if human relationships are to remain sound and pleasant. If everyone were to stick strictly to his legal rights and claims, a pleasant social life would be rendered impossible.

262. Having mentioned the laws for the guidance of human society, God rounds off this address by emphasizing Prayer, for it is Prayers which instil in man the fear of God. They inculcate the feelings of goodness and purity and the disposition to obey the ordinances of God, and foster adherence to righteousness. Without Prayer it would be impossible for men to persist in observing the laws of God, and they would likely be swept away by a current of defiance and disobedience, as happened in the case of the Jews.

263. The expression *al-ṣalāt al-wusṭá* has been variously interpreted to mean the Morning, Mid-Day, Sunset or Night Prayers. But no direct statement explaining this expression has come down from the Prophet himself. All the divergent opinions are deductions made by scholars. The

(239) And even if you are confronting a danger, still perform the Prayer whether on foot or riding; when you are secure, then remember Allah in the manner that He taught you – the manner which you did not know earlier.

(240) Those of you who die leaving behind your wives[264] should make testament of one year's provision without expulsion in favour of your wives; and if they themselves depart, there shall be no blame upon you for what they may do with themselves in an honourable manner. Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise. (241) Likewise, let there be a fair provision for the divorced women; this is an obligation on the God-fearing.

فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا فَإِذَا
أَمِنتُمْ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَمَا
عَلَّمَكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٢٣٩﴾ وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ
وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَاجِهِم
مَّتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ
خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي
مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنفُسِهِنَّ مِن
مَّعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ
﴿٢٤٠﴾ وَلِلْمُطَلَّقَاتِ مَتَاعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٤١﴾

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opinion of the majority seems to be inclined in favour of the Afternoon (*'Aṣr*) Prayer, since it is claimed that on one occasion the Prophet alluded to this as *al-ṣalāt al-wusṭá*. The event cited in support of this inference is that during the Battle of the Ditch the Prophet was once so preoccupied with the problems posed by the siege of Madina, by the polytheists, that he could not perform his *'Aṣr* Prayer within the scheduled time, and the time of sunset drew close. On that occasion the Prophet said: 'God fill the graves and houses of these people with fire. They have caused us to miss our *wusṭá* (mid-most) Prayer.' This statement led people to believe that the expression 'mid-most Prayer' referred to the *'Aṣr* Prayer. It seems more likely, however, that the Prophet meant that the cares of the battle had prevented him and his followers from performing the Prayer in an excellent way; the delay in the Prayer meant that instead of praying with equanimity, concentration and total devotion, they were forced by circumstances to pray hurriedly.

(242) Thus Allah makes His injunctions clear for you that you may understand.

(243) (O Messenger!) Have you thought of those who went forth from their homes for fear of death even though they were in their thousands?[265] Allah said to them: 'Die!' Then He restored them to life.[266]

كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤٢﴾

۞ أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا۟ مِن دِيَٰرِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ ٱلْمَوْتِ فَقَالَ لَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مُوتُوا۟ ثُمَّ أَحْيَٰهُمْ

The adjective *wusṭá*, in addition to signifying the middle position of the subject that it qualifies, also signifies its excellence. Hence the expression could legitimately be interpreted both in the sense of the middle Prayer as well as in the sense of the Prayer which is performed at the right time and with full devotion and attention to God, a Prayer which contains all the attributes of excellence. The admonition which follows, 'stand before Allah as utterly obedient servants', seems to indicate what was meant by the 'mid-most Prayer'.

264. The main discourse has already come to an end (see verse 238 and n. 262 above.) These concluding remarks are supplementary.

265. Here begins a fresh discourse, in which Muslims are urged to struggle and make financial sacrifices for God's cause. Moreover, they have been warned to avoid those forms of corruption which eventually led the Children of Israel into decline and degeneration. In order to appreciate this discourse it should be borne in mind that it was revealed when the Muslims had been driven out of Makka and had lived in Madina for a year and a half. Exasperated by the wrongs to which the unbelievers subjected them, the Muslims had again and again asked the Prophet to permit them to fight. But when they were at long last asked to fight, some of them showed a degree of reluctance and disinclination (see verse 216 above). Their attention is now drawn, therefore, to two incidents in the history of the Israelites from which they may learn their lesson.

266. This refers to the exodus of the Israelites. *Sūrah* 5 (see verse 20 ff.) gives some details of this incident. The Israelites had left Egypt in large numbers and were wandering in the desert, eager to find a home. But when at God's command Moses ordered them to drive the Canaanites out of Palestine and conquer that land, they showed cowardice and refused to

Indeed Allah is Bounteous to men – but most people do not give thanks in return. (244) So fight in the way of Allah and know well that Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (245) Who of you will lend Allah a goodly loan[267] which He will return after multiplying it for him manifold? For Allah has the power both to decrease and increase, and to Him you will be returned.

(246) (O Messenger!) Have you thought of what happened with the elders of the Children of Israel after Moses? They asked one of their Prophets: 'Set up for us a king so that we may fight in the way of Allah.'[268] He said: 'Would you possibly refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?'

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ
وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ
لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢٤٣﴾ وَقَٰتِلُوا۟ فِى
سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٤﴾ مَّن ذَا ٱلَّذِى يُقْرِضُ ٱللَّهَ
قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَٰعِفَهُۥ لَهُۥٓ أَضْعَافًا
كَثِيرَةً ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ وَيَبْصُۜطُ
وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٤٥﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى
ٱلْمَلَإِ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مُوسَىٰٓ
إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لِنَبِىٍّ لَّهُمُ ٱبْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا
نُّقَٰتِلْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ قَالَ هَلْ
عَسَيْتُمْ إِن كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ
ٱلْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَٰتِلُوا۟

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proceed. Eventually God let them wander about for forty years till one full generation of Israelites had died and been replaced by a new one reared in the tough conditions of desert life. It was only then that God enabled the Israelites to overcome the Canaanites. Their former condition is described as death, whereas the later development is seen as their restoration to life.

267. 'Goodly loan' signifies whatever one gives to another person selflessly, and from absolutely pure motives. God describes whatever man spends in this manner as a loan made to none other than Him, and He undertakes to repay that loan and to repay it several-fold. The stipulation, however, is that the loan should be a 'goodly' one; that is, it should not be tainted with selfish designs and should be given for the sake of God, to be spent for purposes pleasing to Him.

They said: 'And why would we not fight in the way of Allah when we have been torn from our homes and our children?' But when fighting was ordained for them they turned back, except a few of them. Allah is well aware of the wrong-doers.

قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِن دِيَارِنَا
وَأَبْنَائِنَا فَلَمَّا كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ
الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ
وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

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268. This took place about a thousand years before Christ. At that time the Israelites were persecuted by the Amalekites who had deprived them of the greater part of Palestine. The Prophet Samuel, who was then ruling over the Israelites, was old. The elders of Israel, therefore, felt the need to appoint as their head someone else under whose leadership they could wage wars. By that time, however, the Israelites had become so deeply infected with Ignorance, and the customs and practices of non-Muslim nations had made such inroads into their lives that the distinction between a religious state committed to serving God and secular monarchy was lost on them. They consequently asked God to appoint a king rather than a religious ruler (*khalifah*) over them. The information contained in the Bible is as follows:

> Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. . . . Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us'. And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Hearken to the voice of the people in what they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you . . .' So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking a king for him. He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you; he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make the implements of war and the equipments of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the

tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your men-servants and maid-servants, and the best of your cattle and asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.' But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No! But we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.' And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Hearken to their voice, and make them a king.' Samuel then said to the men of Israel, 'Go every man to his city.' (1 Samuel 7: 15; 8: 4–22.)

And Samuel said to the people . . . 'And when you saw that Nahash the king of Ammonites came against you, you said to me, No, but a king shall reign over us, when the Lord your God was your king. And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not hearken to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king. Now therefore stand still and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord, that he may send thunder and rain; and you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king.' So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, 'Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for a king.' And Samuel said to the people, 'Fear not; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart, and do not turn aside after vain things which cannot profit or save, for they are vain. For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and right way . . .' (1 Samuel 12: 6–23).

These statements from Samuel make it clear that the demand to appoint a king was disagreeable to God and to His Prophet. It might be asked, however, why the Qur'ān does not contain any denunciation of this demand

(247) And their Prophet said to them: 'Indeed Allah has sent forth Saul (Ṭālūt) as your king.'[269] They said: 'By what right shall he rule over us when we are more worthy than he to dominion, since he is not even very wealthy?' He said: 'Allah has chosen him over you and has endowed him abundantly with both intellectual and physical capacities. Allah indeed has the power to bestow dominion upon whomsoever He wills. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing.'

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ
لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا ۚ قَالُوٓا۟
أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لَهُ ٱلْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ
أَحَقُّ بِٱلْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً
مِّنَ ٱلْمَالِ ۚ قَالَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰهُ
عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُۥ بَسْطَةً فِى
ٱلْعِلْمِ وَٱلْجِسْمِ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ يُؤْتِى
مُلْكَهُۥ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

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of the elders of Israel. The reason is that to the purpose for which this incident has been cited the appropriateness and otherwise of the demand is irrelevant. The purpose here is to show the extent to which cowardice and self-indulgence had become part of Israelite life, and to show how the lack of moral restraint had come to characterize their conduct. It is these which ultimately led to their decline. The aim of the Qur'ānic narrative is to enable Muslims to derive a lesson from this and to ensure that these weaknesses do not creep into their own lives.

269. In the Bible he is called Saul. He was a thirty-year-old Benjaminite youth. 'There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people' (1 Samuel 9: 2). He went out in search of the lost asses of his father. During this search, he passed through the house of Samuel and God informed Samuel that this was the person who had been chosen to govern the people of Israel. Samuel brought Saul to his house, took a vial of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said: 'Has not the Lord anointed you to be the prince over His people of Israel?' (1 Samuel 10: 1). Samuel later called the people of Israel together and proclaimed Saul to be their king (1 Samuel 10: 17).

This was the second Israelite to be anointed by God's command to a position of leadership. Earlier, Aaron had been anointed as the chief priest. The third case of anointment was that of David, and the fourth that of Jesus. There is no clear statement in the Qur'ān regarding the designation of Ṭālūt (the Saul of the Bible) to prophethood. The mere fact of his being

(248) And their Prophet said to them: 'The sign of his dominion is that in his reign the Ark, wherein lies inward peace for you, will be brought back to you, and the sacred relics left behind by the house of Moses and the house of Aaron – borne by angels.[270] Truly in that is a sign for you, if indeed you are men of faith.'

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ ءَايَةَ
مُلْكِهِۦٓ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ ٱلتَّابُوتُ
فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ
وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ ءَالُ مُوسَىٰ
وَءَالُ هَٰرُونَ تَحْمِلُهُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَةً لَّكُمْ إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤٨﴾

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appointed a ruler does not necessarily warrant considering him a Prophet as well.

270. The Biblical version of this incident is different from the Qur'ānic one. The former sheds light, however, on certain details of the incident. It shows that during a military engagement the pagan Philistines had captured the 'Ark of the covenant'. Terrified of the scourge and pestilence which spread wherever they carried the Ark, these pagans placed it on a cart driven by milk cows, and sent it off. (1 Samuel 5–6 – Ed.) Perhaps the Qur'ān alludes to this when it mentions angels, since the cart was driverless and it was the angels who kept it in their custody and brought it to the Israelites. The Qur'ānic statement, that in the Ark 'lies inward peace for you', can be understood in the light of the Biblical statements that the Israelites regarded the Ark as highly auspicious, and as an emblem of their triumph and victory. When they were deprived of it, they began to feel that they had been deprived of the mercy of God. The return of the Ark, therefore, had a highly salutary effect on them as it strengthened their sagging morale and raised their spirits.

The Qur'ānic mention of 'the sacred relics left behind by the house of Aaron' seems to allude to the Tablets of Law bequeathed to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Ark is also said to have contained the original copy of the Torah, which Moses himself had had transcribed and which he had himself handed over to the Levites. The Ark is also supposed to have contained a golden urn holding the manna (Hebrews 9: 2 ff – Ed.), in order that the coming generations might recall God's benevolence to their forefathers during their wandering in the desert. The Ark also probably contained the rod of Moses which was one of the great miracles of God. (Hebrews 9: 5 mentions the rod of Aaron – Ed.)

(249) And when Saul (Ṭālūt) set out with his forces he said: 'Allah will try you with a river, and whoever drinks of it does not belong to me; he who refrains from tasting it – unless it be just a palmful – he indeed belongs to me.' Then all, except a few of them, drank their fill at the river.[271]

But as soon as he and the believers with him went forth across the river, they said: 'Today we have no strength to face Goliath (Jālūt) and his forces.'[272] But those who believed that they were bound to meet their Lord said: 'How often has a small party prevailed against a large party by the leave of Allah.' Allah is with those who remain steadfast.

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُم بِنَهَرٍ فَمَن
شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَن لَّمْ
يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اغْتَرَفَ
غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا
مِّنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا مَعَهُ قَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا
الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالَ
الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلَاقُوا
اللَّهِ كَم مِّن فِئَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ
غَلَبَتْ فِئَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٩﴾

271. This may refer either to the river Jordan or to some other river or stream in that region. Saul wanted to take the Israelite army across the river. He was aware, however, that there was little moral discipline and restraint left in them. Hence he hit upon this device to distinguish the worthy from the worthless. Those who could not endure thirst, even for a short while, could not be expected to remain steadfast in their confrontation with an enemy at whose hands they had already taken a beating.

272. These were presumably the people who had shown their impatience on the bank of the river. (See the preceding note – Ed.)

(250) And when they went forth against Goliath (Jālūt) and his forces, they prayed: 'Our Lord! Shower us with patience, and set our feet firm, and grant us victory over this unbelieving people.' (251) Thereupon by the leave of Allah they put the unbelievers to flight, and David killed Goliath,[273] and Allah granted him dominion and wisdom, and imparted to him the knowledge of whatever He willed. And were it not that Allah repelled men with another, the earth would surely be overlaid with mischief.[274] But Allah is Bounteous to the people of the world (and thus extirpates mischief).

وَلَمَّا بَرَزُوا۟ لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِۦ
قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَآ أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا
وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَٱنصُرْنَا
عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٥٠﴾
فَهَزَمُوهُم بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ
دَاوُۥدُ جَالُوتَ وَءَاتَىٰهُ ٱللَّهُ
ٱلْمُلْكَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُۥ
مِمَّا يَشَآءُ ۗ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ ٱللَّهِ
ٱلنَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ
لَّفَسَدَتِ ٱلْأَرْضُ وَلَٰكِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى
ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٢٥١﴾

273. David was then in the early years of his youth. By chance he joined the army of Saul just when the mighty champion of the Philistine army had challenged the Israelite army to combat. None of the Israelites had the courage to take up the challenge. On seeing this, David took on Goliath in a duel and slew him. From then on, David could do no wrong in the eyes of the Israelites. Saul gave him the hand of his daughter in marriage and ultimately he became the ruler of the Israelites. (For details see 1 Samuel, chapters 17 and 18.)

274. This enunciates the principle according to which God treats the nations as a part of the Divine system governing the world. He allows various nations to attain power and strength within certain limits. But when any nation begins to commit wrongs and exceed reasonable limits, God brings forth another nation as a counterweight. Were the dominion of one nation or party to endure for ever, and were its capacity to perpetrate wrongs granted in perpetuity, God's earth would become full of corruption and wickedness.

(252) These are the signs of Allah which We recite to you in truth, for indeed you are one of those entrusted with a message. (253) And these Messengers (who have been designated to guide men), We exalted some of them above the others. Among them are such as were spoken to by Allah Himself, and some He exalted in other respects. And We granted Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and supported him with the spirit of holiness. Had He willed, those who had seen these clear signs would not have fought one another thereafter. But (it was not the will of Allah to prevent people from disagreement by compulsion, hence) they differed among themselves whereby some attained faith and others denied the Truth. Yet had Allah so willed they would not have fought one another. Allah does whatever He wills.[275]

تِلْكَ ءَايَـٰتُ ٱللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا
عَلَيْكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ
ٱلْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢٥٢﴾ ۞ تِلْكَ ٱلرُّسُلُ
فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۘ مِّنْهُم مَّن
كَلَّمَ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَـٰتٍ ۚ
وَءَاتَيْنَا عِيسَى ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتِ
وَأَيَّدْنَـٰهُ بِرُوحِ ٱلْقُدُسِ ۗ وَلَوْ شَآءَ
ٱللَّهُ مَا ٱقْتَتَلَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِنۢ بَعْدِهِم
مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَتْهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَـٰتُ وَلَـٰكِنِ
ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ ءَامَنَ وَمِنْهُم مَّن
كَفَرَ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مَا ٱقْتَتَلُوا۟
وَلَـٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿٢٥٣﴾

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275. The main cause of the differences which arose after people had received true knowledge through the Prophets, and which were even aggravated into feuds and wars, is not that God was helpless, and lacked the power to put an end to the fighting. Had He willed so, no one would have had the power to defy the teachings of the Prophets, to take the course of disbelief and rebellion against Him, and to spread mischief and corruption in His world. But it was not His will to deprive human beings of their free-will and choice, and to compel them to follow a particular course. He has created human beings on earth in order to test them and

(254) O you who believe! Spend out of what We have provided you[276] before there comes a Day when there will be no buying and selling, and no friendship and intercession will be of any use. And they who disbelieve, they, indeed they are the wrong-doers.[277]

hence endowed them with the freedom to choose from the various alternative courses of belief and action.

God did not appoint the Prophets as policemen to force people to faith and obedience. He sent them, instead, with reasonable arguments and clear signs in order to invite people to righteousness. Hence the cause of all the differences and wranglings and fighting which took place was that people, in exercising the free-will granted to them by God, followed divergent courses. In short, people follow divergent ways precisely because of God's omnipotent will that men should have a choice. It would be a grave misunderstanding to hold that people follow different paths because God failed to persuade people to follow the path which He wanted them to choose.

276. This means spending in the way of God. The instruction given here is that those who have adopted the cause of the true faith should undertake financial sacrifices for its sake.

277. Here the expression 'they who disbelieve' signifies either those who refused to obey God and held their property to be dearer than God's good pleasure, or those who did not believe in the Day of which they had been warned, or those who cherished the false illusion that in the Hereafter they would somehow be able to secure their salvation and that their association with men devoted to God would stand them in good stead for they would intercede with God on their behalf.

(255) Allah, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting by Whom all subsist, there is no God but He.[278] Neither slumber seizes Him, nor sleep;[279] to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth.[280] Who is there who might intercede with Him save with His leave?[281] ►

ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْحَىُّ ٱلْقَيُّومُ ۚ لَا تَأْخُذُهُۥ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ ۚ لَّهُۥ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ مَن ذَا ٱلَّذِى يَشْفَعُ عِندَهُۥٓ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۚ

278. Irrespective of the number of gods or objects of worship set up by ignorant people, the fact remains that godhead in its entirety belongs exclusively to the Eternal Being, Who is indebted to no one for His existence. In fact, He is not only self-existent, but upon Him rests the entire order of the universe. He alone wields all sovereign authority over His dominion. None shares either His attributes or His power and might, and no one has the same claims against the creatures as He. Hence, if anywhere in the heavens or the earth someone sets up anything or anybody as an object of worship and service (*ilāh*) either instead of or in addition to the One True God this amounts to declaring war on reality.

279. This is a refutation of the ideas of those who, in formulating their concepts of God, are inclined to consider God analogous to their own imperfect selves and hence ascribe to God the weaknesses characteristic of human beings. An instance at hand is the famous Biblical statement that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the seventh day He rested (see Genesis, chapters 1 and 2).

280. To God belongs the heavens and the earth and everything therein. There is no one who shares anything with God in governance either of the heavens or of the earth. Any conceivable being other than God would necessarily be a part of the universe and thus belong to, and be a subject of, God rather than His partner and equal.

281. This is a refutation of the ideas of those polytheists who consider either saints, angels or other beings to be so influential with God that if they were adamant in demanding something of Him, their demand would prevail. They are being told that, far from anyone having the power to impose his will on God, none – not even the greatest Prophets and the most highly esteemed angels – will dare utter one word in the majestic court of the Lord unless they are expressly permitted to do so.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

He knows what lies before men and what is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to anything of His knowledge save what He wills them to attain.[282] His Dominion[283] overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not; He is All-High, All-Glorious.[284]

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِۦٓ إِلَّا بِمَا شَآءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَـُٔودُهُۥ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِيُّ ٱلْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

282. Here another blow is struck against polytheism. On the basis of the concept of God's unlimited sovereignty and omnipotence it was stressed, in the foregoing verses, that no one shares independently in God's governance of the universe, and no one is so powerful with God that his intercession would decisively influence His judgement. The same point is stressed here but in a different manner. It is pointed out that no one possesses the knowledge that would enable him to comprehend the order of the universe and the considerations underlying it, so no one can legitimately interfere in its governance. The knowledge of human beings, of *jinn*, of angels and of all other creatures is limited and imperfect. No one's knowledge embraces all the facts of the universe. If someone did have the right to interfere even in only a part of the universe, and if his suggestions were of necessity to be put into effect, the entire order of the universe would be disrupted. Creatures are incapable of understanding what is best for them, and do not have the capacity to know how best the universe should be governed. It is God alone Who knows everything.

283. The Arabic term *kursī* signifies sovereignty, dominion and authority.

(The word *Kursī* has been variously interpreted by Muslim scholars. The literal meaning is obvious; it signifies that which one sits on. Scholars have differed, however, as to whether the word has been used in the Qur'ān literally or figuratively. They have also disagreed whether the *Kursī* and *'Arsh* which occur in the Qur'ān have one and the same meaning or are different. The main opinions expressed by the scholars are the following: (i) that *Kursī* signifies God's knowledge, a view attributed to Ibn 'Abbas; (ii) that it is identical with *'Arsh* (Throne), a view attributed to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; (iii) that it signifies God's power; (iv) in opposition to such views a large number of scholars insist that *Kursī* should be considered a reality rather than be understood figuratively. In addition to many earlier scholars, this view was vigorously championed by Ibn Taymīyah. It should be

remembered, however, that Ibn Taymīyah and others who hold this opinion, side by side with affirming that *Kursī* is a reality, also emphasize that man has no knowledge about the nature and modality of *Kursī* and that it ought to be treated as something unique, being related to God Who is unique both in His essence and attributes. (See the commentaries of Ālūsī, Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr and Shawkānī on this verse. See also Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā Ibn Taymīyah*, vol. 5, pp. 55–8 and vol. 6, pp. 584–5. It is interesting to note that Sayyid Quṭb, (martyred 1386 A.H./1966 C.E.), a contemporary of Mawdūdī and one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of our time, has interpreted the verse exactly as Mawdūdī did – Ed.)

284. This verse is generally known as the 'Verse of the Throne' and it provides in one piece a knowledge of God without parallel.

The question that arises here is: What is the occasion for describing the Lord of the Universe and His attributes? In order to appreciate this one should rehearse the discourse beginning with verse 243 and continuing up to this point. In this discourse the believers were urged to strive with their lives and belongings to establish the true faith and were warned to get rid of the weaknesses which had characterized the conduct of the Israelites. A fundamental fact about war – that victory and success do not depend upon superiority in either numbers or weapons – was then indicated. They depend rather on faith, fortitude, discipline and firm resolution. Thereafter the Divine wisdom underlying fighting was disclosed, namely that God removes one set of people by means of another in order to maintain the good administration of the world. For were one group's dominance to be assured in perpetuity, the lives of all other human beings would become miserable.

This was followed by the clarification of a misunderstanding which often arises in the minds of ignorant people. This misunderstanding arose from the false assumption that God had sent His Prophets so that all diversity and disagreement might come to an end. The people who accepted this premise, however, saw considerable diversity and disagreement, and were aware that falsehood existed side by side with Truth. They were agitated by the thought that this state of affairs might suggest helplessness on God's part, that He had failed to stamp out the evils He wanted to. In reply to this it was pointed out that it was not God's will to compel all human beings to follow one and the same way. Had it been so, man could not have deviated from the course set for him by God. This observation was followed by a passing reference to the subject with which the discourse opened. Finally, the point is made that no matter how many divergent beliefs, viewpoints, ways of life and conduct exist in actual life, the reality underlying the order of the universe is the one stated in this verse, and it remains unaffected by the misconceptions of people. On the other hand, however, it is not God's purpose to compel people to accept it. Whoever accepts it will find it to his own benefit; whoever rejects it, will find the result harmful.

(256) There is no compulsion in religion.[285] The right way now stands clearly distinguished from the wrong. Hence he who rejects the evil ones[286] and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle. And Allah (Whom he has held for support) is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (257) Allah is the Guardian of those who believe, and brings them out of every darkness into light.[287] ►

لَآ إِكْرَاهَ فِي ٱلدِّينِ قَد تَّبَيَّنَ ٱلرُّشْدُ مِنَ
ٱلْغَيِّ فَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِٱلطَّٰغُوتِ
وَيُؤْمِنۢ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱسْتَمْسَكَ
بِٱلْعُرْوَةِ ٱلْوُثْقَىٰ لَا ٱنفِصَامَ لَهَا وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾ ٱللَّهُ وَلِيُّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟
يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ

285. *Dīn* here signifies the belief about God embodied in the above 'Verse of the Throne' and the entire system of life which rests upon it. The verse means that the system of Islam, embracing belief, morals and practical conduct cannot be imposed by compulsion. These are not things to which people can be yoked forcibly.

286. Literally *ṭāghūt* means anyone who exceeds his legitimate limits. In the Qur'ānic terminology, however, it refers to the creature who exceeds the limits of his creatureliness and arrogates to himself godhead and lordship. There are three stages of man's transgression and rebellion against God. The first stage is that one acknowledges in principle that obedience to God is right, but disregards it in practice. This is *fisq* (transgression). The second stage is that one not only disobeys but also rejects obedience in principle, and thus either refuses to become the subject of anyone at all or adopts someone other than God as the object of service and devotion. This is *kufr* (infidelity). The third stage is that one not only rebels against one's Lord but also imposes one's own will (in disregard of the Will of God – Ed.) on God's world and God's creatures. Anyone who reaches such a point is termed *ṭāghūt* and no one can be a true believer in God unless the authority of such a *ṭāghūt* (evil one) is rejected.

287. The 'darkness' mentioned here means the darkness of Ignorance, which throws man off the path of salvation and well-being and directs his energies and efforts to wrong directions in defiance of reality. 'Light' here means the knowledge of Truth with the help of which man comes to know his own reality and that of the universe; this knowledge also shows him the purpose of his life, and thus leads him consciously to adopt the Right Way.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

And those who disbelieve, their guardians are the evil ones;[288] they bring them out of light into all kinds of darkness. These are destined for the Fire, and there they shall abide.

(258) Did you not consider the case of the person[289] who remonstrated with Abraham[290] about who was Abraham's Lord because Allah had granted him dominion?[291] ▶

وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَوۡلِيَآؤُهُمُ
ٱلطَّٰغُوتُ يُخۡرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ ٱلنُّورِ إِلَى
ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِۗ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ أَصۡحَٰبُ
ٱلنَّارِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾
أَلَمۡ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِي حَآجَّ إِبۡرَٰهِـۧمَ فِي
رَبِّهِۦٓ أَنۡ ءَاتَىٰهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡمُلۡكَ

288. Here *ṭāghūt* (see n. 286 above) has a plural connotation. It implies that by turning away from God a man is subjected not to the tyranny of one, but to the tyranny of many *ṭawāghīt* (evil one). One of these is Satan, who throws up new temptations and allurements. Another potential *ṭāghūt* (transgressor) is man's own animal self, which seeks to subjugate him to his appetites and desires. There are many more *ṭāghūt* in the world outside oneself; one's wife and children, one's relatives, one's family and one's community, one's friends and acquaintances, one's social environment and one's people, one's leaders and guides, one's government and rulers are all potential *ṭāghūt*, each one of whom seeks to have his purposes served. Man remains subjected to these innumerable masters throughout his life, not knowing precisely whom he should please and whose displeasure he should avoid.

289. It was stated earlier that God is the protector and supporter of the man of faith and brings him out of darkness into light whereas the protectors and supporters of the unbelievers are *ṭāghūt* who lead him out of light into darkness. It is to illustrate this that three examples are cited here. The first is that of a person before whom truth was put with such clear and impressive arguments that he could not refute it, but since he had placed his reins in the hands of *ṭāghūt*, he still could not believe in it. The two subsequent examples are those of two people who clung to God as their support, and God drew them out of darkness so that they were enabled to perceive directly those realities which are beyond the reach of man's perception.

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

When Abraham said: 'My Lord is He Who grants life and death', he replied: 'I grant life and death.' Abraham said: 'But surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the east; now you cause it to rise from the west.' Thereupon the denier of the Truth was confounded.[292] Allah does not direct the wrong-doers to the right way.

إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّيَ ٱلَّذِي يُحْيِۦ
وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا۠ أُحْيِۦ وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ
إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِٱلشَّمْسِ مِنَ
ٱلْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ ٱلْمَغْرِبِ
فَبُهِتَ ٱلَّذِي كَفَرَ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي
ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

290. Here the reference is to Nimrod the ruler of the land of Abraham's birth, Iraq. The event which is referred to here is not mentioned at all in the Bible. However, the whole story occurs in the Talmud and is largely in harmony with the Qur'ânic version. In the Talmudic version it is said that the father of Abraham occupied the highest office in Nimrod's government. When Abraham denounced polytheism, preached the doctrine of the unity of God and smashed the idols of the temple, his own father lodged a complaint against him before the king. This was followed by a conversation which is mentioned here.

291. The dispute was over the question: Whom did he acknowledge as his Lord? The reason why this dispute arose was that God had granted kingship to the remonstrator, namely Nimrod. In order to comprehend fully the nature of the dispute hinted at in these statements, it is necessary to bear in mind the following:

(1) All polytheistic societies from the earliest times till today share one characteristic: they acknowledge God to be the Lord of lords, the greatest of all deities. They are unwilling to acknowledge Him, however, as the only God, the only object of man's worship and service.

(2) Polytheists tend to divide godhead into two categories. One of these belongs to the supernatural stratum. The being invested with godhead at this stratum rules over the entire system of causation and is the one to whom man turns for the fulfilment of his needs and for solutions to his problems. With this godhead the polytheists associate spirits, angels, *jinn*, heavenly bodies and several other beings. To them they address their prayers. They regard them as the objects of their worship. It is at their altars that offerings and sacrifices are placed. The second category of godhead belongs to the social and political stratum, and refers to the being who has the privilege of absolute sovereignty: the one who is entitled to make the rules of cdnduct for human life, the one who is entitled to

unreserved obedience, the one who has unlimited authority to command in worldly matters. Polytheists of all ages have either wrested this godhead from God altogether, or they have had this godhead distributed, in addition to God, among many others such as royal dynasties, religious divines and the venerated personalities of society, whether they belonged to the past or to their own times. Many royal families have laid claim to godhead of the second category and, in order to consolidate their claim, they have pretended to be the offspring of gods in the former sense. In general there has been collusion between the religious and the ruling classes on this question.

(3) Nimrod's claim to godhead belongs to this second category. He did not deny the existence of God, and he did not deny that He was the creator of the heavens and the earth, and that He alone governed the entire universe. Nimrod did not claim for himself that he held the reins of the entire realm of causation in his hands; he claimed rather that he was the absolute sovereign of Chaldaea and its inhabitants, that in his realm his word was law, that there was no authority superior to his own to which he was answerable. Any Chaldaean who did not either acknowledge him to be his lord or took anyone other than him to be so, was a rebel and a traitor.

(4) Abraham asserted that he acknowledged none else but the creator of the universe as his God, the only object worthy of his worship. He also denied categorically the godhead and overlordship of anyone else. This raised the question of how far the new creed could be tolerated, in so far as it was opposed to the tenets of the national religion and rejected the current ideas regarding the deities it worshipped. It also alerted the establishment in so far as Abraham's ideas might constitute a serious threat to the national state and to the position and privilege of its ruling coterie.

292. Even though it was clear from Abraham's very first sentence that none other than God could legitimately be regarded as the Lord, Nimrod resorted to an unreasonable reply. But Abraham's second statement left no room even for Nimrod's brazenness. He knew well enough that the sun and the moon were subjected to the overlordship of the same God as Abraham had acknowledged as his Lord. What, then, could he say in reply? To accept the Truth which Abraham had made crystal clear by his argument meant that Nimrod ought to part with his absolutist despotism. The devil within him was not prepared for that. Hence he was left wonderstruck, unable to get out of the darkness of self-adoration to the light of Truth. If he had taken God rather than the Evil One as his patron and supporter, the true path would have been opened to him after Abraham's preaching.

According to the Talmud, Abraham was interned in prison on the orders of this king. He remained in prison for ten days, after which the king decided to have him burnt alive. It was then that the famous incident of Abraham being thrown into the fire took place (see Qur'ān 21: 51 ff.; 29: 16; 37: 83).

(259) Or consider him who passed by a town that was fallen down upon its turrets,[293] and exclaimed: 'How will Allah restore life to this town that is now dead?'[294] Allah then caused him to remain dead for a hundred years and then raised him to life, and asked him: 'How long did you remain in this state?' He replied: 'I remained so for a day or a part of a day.' Allah rejoined, 'No, you have rather stayed thus for a hundred years. But look at your food and your drink, there is no deterioration in them. And look at your ass (how its entire skeleton has rotted)! And We did all this so that We might make you a token of instruction for people.[295] And see how We will put the bones (of the ass) together and will clothe them with flesh.' Thus when the reality became clear to him, he said: 'I know that Allah has power over everything.'

أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ
عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّىٰ يُحْيِي هَٰذِهِ اللَّهُ
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۖ فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ
بَعَثَهُ ۖ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ ۖ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا
أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ ۖ قَالَ بَل لَّبِثْتَ مِائَةَ
عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِكَ
وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ ۖ وَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ
حِمَارِكَ وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً
لِّلنَّاسِ ۖ وَانظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ
كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا
لَحْمًا ۚ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ
اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٥٩﴾

293. It is irrelevant to ask who the person was and the place where this incident occurred. The real purpose in mentioning this event is to show how God showed light to the one who had chosen God as his protector and supporter. As for determining the name of the person and the locality, we neither possess the means to do so, nor is such an endeavour in any way beneficial. What seems to be evident from the statement that follows is that the person concerned must necessarily have been a Prophet.

(260) And recall when Abraham said: 'My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead,' Allah said: 'Why! Do you have no faith?' Abraham replied: 'Yes, but that my heart be at rest.'[296] He said: 'Then take four birds, and tame them to yourself, then put a part of them on every hill, and summon them; they will come to you flying. Know well that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.'[297]

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِى كَيْفَ
تُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ ۖ قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن ۖ قَالَ بَلَىٰ
وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِى ۖ قَالَ فَخُذْ
أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ ٱلطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ
ٱجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ
ٱدْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا ۚ وَٱعْلَمْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ
عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٠﴾

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294. This question does not signify that the person concerned denied or entertained any doubts regarding life after death. His enquiry merely indicates his wish to have direct knowledge of reality, like the Prophets of the past.

295. The restoration of life to a man considered to have died a hundred years ago was in itself sufficient to make him, for his contemporaries, a living testimony.

296. That is, the rest and inner peace that one attains as a result of direct personal observation.

297. People have subjected this incident and the one above to very strange interpretations. If one bears in mind, however, God's dealings with the Prophets, one will not feel any need to strain one's energies in hammering out such artificially-contrived interpretations. The truth of the matter is that the kind of function that ordinary believers are required to perform requires of them no more than believing in certain truths without perceiving them through their senses. The function entrusted by God to the Prophets is such that they ought to have direct knowledge of the truths, the acceptance of which they are required to invite others to.

Thanks to the nature of their mission, the Prophets had to tell the world that while others resorted to conjecture and fancy, they spoke from personal direct observation and experience; that while others could claim to possess only imagination, they possessed reliable knowledge; that while others were blind, they alone had the God-given capacity to perceive the Truth. It is for this reason that the angels come to the Prophets and they see them

(261) The example of those[298] who spend their wealth in the way of Allah[299] is like that of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear there are a hundred grains. Thus Allah multiplies the action of whomsoever He wills. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing.[300] ▶

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنْبُلَةٍ مِّائَةُ حَبَّةٍ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦١﴾

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with their own eyes. It is for the same reason that the Prophets were allowed a glimpse of the system of governance of the heavens and the earth. It is for the same reason, again, that they were enabled to observe Heaven and Hell and witness scenes of resurrection.

The Prophets are in possession of faith in the Unseen at the time they are invested with prophethood. After being designated to prophethood, they are further honoured by special favours and privileges, and initiated into what may be termed as 'faith in the seen' (for the 'Unseen' is changed for them to the 'seen'). This favour is a special prerogative of the Prophets. (For a further explanation see *Sūrah* 9, nn. 17, 18, 19 and 34.)

298. Here the discourse turns to the subject touched upon in verses 244 ff. above. Believers were urged to sacrifice life and property for the sake of the great cause in which they believed. It is difficult, however, to persuade those whose standard of judgement in respect of economic matters has not completely changed, to rise above either personal or narrow group interests and dispense their wealth wholeheartedly for the sake of a righteous cause. People who have a materialistic outlook and whose life constitutes an uninterrupted pursuit of money, who adore every single penny they have, and who can never stop thinking about their balance sheets can never have the capacity to do anything really effective for the sake of higher ideals. When such people apparently do spend money for the sake of higher moral ideals, it is merely an outward act which is performed after carefully calculating the material benefits which are likely to accrue either to them, to their group or to their nation. With this outlook a person cannot go one step forward along the path of that religion which requires man to become indifferent to considerations of worldly profit and loss, and constantly to spend time, energy and money to make the Word of God reign supreme.

To follow such a course requires a moral outlook of an altogether different kind; it requires breadth of vision and magnanimity and, above

▶ *Translation continued on next page.*

(262) Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow up their spending by stressing their benevolence and causing hurt, will find their reward secure with their Lord. They have no cause for fear and grief.[301] (263) To speak a kind word and to forgive people's faults is better than charity followed by hurt. Allah is All-Sufficient, All-Forbearing.[302]

الَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
ثُمَّ لَا يُتْبِعُونَ مَا أَنفَقُوا مَنًّا وَلَا
أَذًى لَّهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ
وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ
﴿٢٦٢﴾ ۞ قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ
مِّن صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ
حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٣﴾

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all, an exclusive devotion to God. At the same time it requires that man's collective life should be so re-moulded as to become conducive to the growth of the moral qualities mentioned above rather than to the growth of a materialistic outlook and behaviour. Hence the three succeeding sections (i.e. verses 261–81 – Ed.) are devoted to enunciating instructions designed to foster such an outlook.

299. A great many expenditures fall under the category of spending 'in the way of Allah', as long as this is done according to the laws of God and with the intention of seeking His good pleasure. This includes spending one's wealth to fulfil one's legitimate needs, to provide for one's family, to look after the needs of relatives, to help the needy and to contribute to the general welfare and to spread the true religion and so on.

300. The greater the sincerity and the more intense the feeling with which one spends for the sake of God, the greater will be God's reward. It is not difficult at all for God, Who blesses a grain so that out of it seven hundred grains grow, to allow one's charity to grow in like manner so that the unit of money one spends will return seven hundred fold. This statement is followed by a mention of two of God's attributes. First is His munificence. His Hand is not clenched so as to restrain Him from recompensing man for his deeds to the fullest extent that he deserves. Second, God is All-Knowing. He is not unaware of what one spends and the spirit in which one spends. So there is no reason to fear that one will not receive one's due reward.

301. They need not fear that they will not be amply rewarded or that they will have any reason to feel remorse for spending in the way of God.

(264) Believers! Do not nullify your acts of charity by stressing your benevolence and causing hurt as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen by men and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day.[303] The example of his spending is that of a rock with a thin coating of earth upon it: when a heavy rain smites it, the earth is washed away, leaving the rock bare;[304] such people derive no gain from their acts of charity. Allah does not set the deniers of the Truth on the right way.[305]

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تُبْطِلُوا۟
صَدَقَٰتِكُم بِٱلْمَنِّ وَٱلْأَذَىٰ كَٱلَّذِى
يُنفِقُ مَالَهُۥ رِئَآءَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ
وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ ۖ فَمَثَلُهُۥ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ
عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُۥ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُۥ
صَلْدًا ۖ لَّا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَىْءٍ
مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا۟ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ
ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٦٤﴾

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302. This statement comprises two parts. First, God is not in need of man's charity. Second, since God Himself is tolerant, He will tend to like those who are generous and tolerant rather than those who are narrow-minded and mean. How is it possible for God, Who lavishes upon man all kinds of bounties and forgives him again and again despite his faults and failings, to be pleased with those who, even if they were able to offer anyone a loaf of bread, unfailingly trample upon the receiver's self-respect by constantly reminding him of the favours they have done him? For this reason it has been stated in the Ḥadīth that God will have nothing to do with those who continually remind those whom they have been kind to of their acts of generosity. (Muslim, 'Īmān', 171; 'Libās', 25; Tirmidhī, 'Buyū'', 5; Nasā'ī, 'Zakāh', 69; 'Buyū'', 5; Ibn Mājah, 'Tijārah', 30 – Ed.)

303. The desire to display one's good deeds itself proves that the person concerned does not truly believe in God and the Hereafter. One who does good merely in order to impress people with his righteousness clearly regards those persons as his god. Such a person neither expects reward from God nor is he concerned that his good deeds will some day be reckoned to his credit.

304. In this parable, 'heavy rain' signifies charity, and 'rock' the wicked intent and motive which lie behind external acts of charity. The expression, 'with a thin coating of earth upon it' signifies the external aspect of charity

(265) The example of those who spend their wealth single-mindedly to please Allah is that of a garden on a high ground. If a heavy rain smites it, it brings forth its fruits twofold, and if there is no heavy rain, even a light shower suffices it.[306] Allah sees all that you do.

(266) Would any of you desire that he should have a garden of palms and vines with rivers flowing beneath it – a garden in which he has every manner of fruit – and that it should then be struck by a fiery whirlwind and be utterly burnt down at a time when old age has overtaken him and his offspring are still too small to look after their affairs?[307] Thus does Allah make His teachings clear to you that you may reflect.

وَمَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمُ
ٱبْتِغَآءَ مَرْضَاتِ ٱللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيتًا مِّنْ
أَنفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍۭ بِرَبْوَةٍ
أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَـَٔاتَتْ أُكُلَهَا
ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ
فَطَلٌّ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ
﴿٢٦٥﴾ أَيَوَدُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن تَكُونَ لَهُۥ
جَنَّةٌ مِّن نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِى مِن
تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَـٰرُ لَهُۥ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ
ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَأَصَابَهُ ٱلْكِبَرُ وَلَهُۥ ذُرِّيَّةٌ
ضُعَفَآءُ فَأَصَابَهَآ إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ
فَٱحْتَرَقَتْ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ
لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٦٦﴾

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which conceals the wicked intent and motive of a man. These explanations make the significance and purport of the parable clear. The natural effect of rainfall should be the growth of plants and harvest. But if the earth, which is the repository of fertility, is insignificant in quantity, for example only a coating of it on some rock, the result will be that instead of yielding any beneficial result the rainfall may even prove harmful. Similarly, charity has the capacity to generate goodness and benevolence in human beings. Man's potential for goodness, however, is conditional on sincerity. Devoid of that charity leads to sheer loss and waste.

305. Here the term *kāfir* is used in the sense of the ungrateful person who refuses to acknowledge benevolence. People who either make use of the bounties of God in order to seek the gratitude of God's creatures rather than God's good pleasure, or who spend on others and then hurt them by stressing their acts of benevolence and kindness, are ungrateful to God for

(267) Believers! Spend out of the good things you have earned and out of what We have produced for you from the earth, and choose not for your spending the bad things such as you yourselves would not accept or accept only by overlooking its defects. Know well that Allah is Most-Sufficient, Most-Praiseworthy.[308] (268) Satan frightens you with poverty and bids you to commit indecency whereas Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounty. Allah is All-Generous, All-Knowing.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ أَنفِقُوا۟ مِن
طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّآ
أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا۟
ٱلْخَبِيثَ مِنْهُ تُنفِقُونَ وَلَسْتُم
بِـَٔاخِذِيهِ إِلَّآ أَن تُغْمِضُوا۟ فِيهِ ۚ
وَٱعْلَمُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِىٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿٢٦٧﴾
ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ يَعِدُكُمُ ٱلْفَقْرَ
وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِٱلْفَحْشَآءِ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ
يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا ۗ وَٱللَّهُ
وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٨﴾

His bounties and favours. Since such people do not seek to please God, God does not care to direct them to the way that leads to His good pleasure.

306. 'Heavy rain' signifies here charity motivated by a high degree of benevolence and sincerity. 'Light shower' refers to charity deficient in sincerity and goodness, though not altogether devoid of them.

307. It is obvious that a man does not like to see the earnings of his lifetime destroyed in his old age, when he needs them badly and when he can no longer earn. How is it, then, that he can contemplate stepping into the realm of the Hereafter and finding suddenly that he is empty-handed; that he has sown nothing from which he can reap the fruit? In the Next World there will be no opportunity to begin earning anew. Whatever one can do towards ensuring one's well-being in the Hereafter must be done in this world. If one devotes oneself totally to the pursuit of the riches of this world rather than to the Hereafter, one's situation will be as pitiable as that of the age-stricken man whose orchard (his source of income in his old age) is reduced to ashes too late for him to produce a new one.

308. It is obvious that He Who is invested with the best attributes cannot be appreciative of those possessed of low and evil qualities. God is, for instance, Generous and Beneficent, and constantly showers His favours

(269) He grants wisdom to those whom He wills; and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted much good.[309] Yet none except men of understanding take heed.

(270) Allah knows whatever you spend or whatever you vow (to spend). The wrong-doers have none to succour them.[310] (271) If you dispense your charity openly, it is well; but if you conceal it and pay it to the needy in secret, it will be even better for you.[311] This will atone for several of your bad deeds.[312] Allah is well aware of all that you do.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَنْ
يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا
كَثِيرًا ۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو
الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢٦٩﴾ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ نَفَقَةٍ
أَوْ نَذَرْتُمْ مِنْ نَذْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
يَعْلَمُهُ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ
أَنْصَارٍ ﴿٢٧٠﴾ إِنْ تُبْدُوا
الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ ۖ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا
وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ ۚ
وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ مِنْ
سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٧١﴾

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and bounties on His creatures. How is it possible for Him, then, to love those who are mean, niggardly and vicious?

309. 'Wisdom' signifies sound perception and sound judgement. The purpose of this statement is to point out that one who is possessed of wisdom will follow God's path rather than that of Satan. The followers of Satan believe that it is the height of wisdom and shrewdness to be constantly concerned with saving out of one's earnings, and to be perpetually on the look-out for a higher income. But for those endowed with Divine perception such an attitude is sheer folly. True wisdom consists in using one's resources moderately to meet one's needs and in spending whatever is left for charitable purposes. It may be possible for a person who does not spend for charitable purposes to attain a much greater degree of worldly prosperity than others. The life of this world, however, is only a fraction of man's total life which is not limited to the confines of this world. One who risks the well-being of his eternal existence for the sake of highly transient well-being in this world is indeed a fool. The truly wise person is he who makes full use of the tenure of this life and invests his resources in prosperity in the life that will never cease.

(272) You are not responsible for setting these people on the right way; Allah sets on the right way whomsoever He wills. Whatever wealth you spend in charity is to your own benefit for you spend merely to please Allah. So, whatever you spend in charity will be repaid to you in full and you shall not be wronged.[313]

۞ لَّيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَىٰهُمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا تُنفِقُونَ إِلَّا ٱبْتِغَآءَ وَجْهِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٢﴾

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310. Whether or not a man spends in the way of God, and whether or not he vows to spend in the way of God, God is fully aware both of his intentions and deeds. All those who either spend for the sake of God or vow to spend for the sake of God will be adequately rewarded. As for those who have either spent or have vowed to spend for others than God, no one will save them from God's chastisement.

'Vow' means either a man's pledge to spend something or to perform some act of goodness which is not obligatory on him providing a particular wish of his is fulfilled. Provided that this vow is related to some wish which is in itself permissible and good and that the person concerned makes it to none but God and for the sake of God, then such a vow will be reckoned as an act of obedience to God and its fulfilment will be worthy of reward. Otherwise such a vow will be seen as an act of disobedience and sin and its fulfilment will invite punishment from God.

311. If charity is of an obligatory nature it is preferable to dispense it openly. Non-obligatory charity should preferably be dispensed secretly. This principle applies to all acts. As a rule, it is more meritorious to perform obligatory acts openly and non-obligatory acts of goodness, secretly.

312. The performance of good deeds in secret leads to the continual improvement of one's life and character. One's good qualities develop fully and one's bad qualities gradually wither away. This makes a man so acceptable to God that He pardons the sins that he might have committed.

313. In the beginning Muslims tended to hesitate in helping either their non-Muslim relatives or other non-Muslims who were in need. They thought that helping Muslims only constituted 'spending in the way of Allah'. This verse rejects this attitude. The purpose of this verse is to point out that Muslims are not responsible for forcing true guidance down the

(273) Those needy ones who are wholly wrapped up in the cause of Allah, and who are hindered from moving about the earth in search of their livelihood especially deserve help. He who is unaware of their circumstances supposes them to be wealthy because of their dignified bearing, but you will know them by their countenance, although they do not go about begging of people with importunity. And whatever wealth you will spend on helping them, Allah will know of it.[314]

لِلْفُقَرَآءِ ٱلَّذِينَ أُحْصِرُوا۟ فِى
سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ
ضَرْبًا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ يَحْسَبُهُمُ
ٱلْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَآءَ مِنَ ٱلتَّعَفُّفِ
تَعْرِفُهُم بِسِيمَٰهُمْ لَا يَسْـَٔلُونَ
ٱلنَّاسَ إِلْحَافًا ۗ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِنْ
خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٧٣﴾

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throats of people; conveying the message of Truth to people absolves them of the obligation incumbent upon them. It is, then, for God either to favour the recipients of the message with true perception or not. In addition Muslims should not shrink from helping their relatives in the affairs of the world on the ground that they are not following the true guidance; they will be rewarded by God for whatever help they render to needy persons for the sake of God.

314. The people referred to here are those who, because they had dedicated themselves wholly to serving the religion of God, were unable to earn their livelihood. In the time of the Prophet there was a group of such volunteer workers, known as Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah, consisting of about three or four hundred people who had forsaken their homes and gone to Madina. They remained at all times in the company of the Prophet, always at his beck and call to perform whatever service he required of them. They were dispatched by the Prophet on whatever expeditions he wished. Whenever there was nothing to do elsewhere, they stayed in Madina and devoted themselves to acquiring religious knowledge and imparting it to others. Since they were full-time workers and had no private resources to meet their needs, God pointed out to the Muslims that helping such people was the best way of 'spending in the way of Allah'.

(274) Those who spend their wealth by night and by day, both in secret and openly, will find that their reward is secure with their Lord and that there is no reason for them to entertain any fear or grief. (275) As for those who devour interest,[315] they behave as the one whom Satan has confounded with his touch.[316]

ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُم بِٱلَّيْلِ
وَٱلنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٤﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ ٱلرِّبَوٰا۟ لَا يَقُومُونَ
إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ ٱلَّذِى يَتَخَبَّطُهُ
ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ مِنَ ٱلْمَسِّ

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315. The term *ribā* in Arabic means 'to grow, to exceed, to increase'. Technically, it denotes the amount that a lender receives from a borrower at a fixed rate of interest. At the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān several forms of interest transactions were in vogue and were designated as *ribā* by the Arabs. Of these one was that the vendor sold an article and fixed a time limit for the payment of the price, stipulating that if the buyer failed to pay within the specified period of time, he would extend the time limit but increase the price of the article. Another was that a man loaned a sum of money to another person and stipulated that the borrower should return a specified amount in excess of the amount loaned within a given time limit. A third form of interest transaction was that the borrower and vendor agreed that the former would repay the loan within a certain limit at a fixed rate of interest, and that if he failed to do so within the limit, the lender would extend the time limit, but at the same time would increase the rate of interest. It is to transactions such as these that the injunctions mentioned here apply.

316. The Arabs used the word *majnūn* (possessed by the *jinn*) to characterize the insane. The Qur'ān uses the same expression about those who take interest. Just as an insane person, unconstrained by ordinary reason, resorts to all kinds of immoderate acts, so does one who takes interest. He pursues his craze for money as if he were insane. He is heedless of the fact that interest cuts the very roots of human love, brotherhood and fellow-feeling, and undermines the welfare and happiness of human society, and that his enrichment is at the expense of the well-being of many other human beings. This is the state of his 'insanity' in this world: since a man will rise in the Hereafter in the same state in which he dies in the present world, he will be resurrected as a lunatic.

Seized in this state they say: 'Buying and selling is but a kind of interest',[317] even though Allah has made buying and selling lawful, and interest unlawful.[318] ►

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا ٱلْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ ۗ وَأَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ ۚ

317. The unsoundness of this view lies in not differentiating between the profit one gains on investment in commercial enterprises on the one hand, and interest on the other. As a result of this confusion, the proponents of this view argue that if profit on money invested in a business enterprise is permissible, why should the profit accruing on loaned money be deemed unlawful? Similar arguments are advanced by those who thrive on interest in our own times. Their argument runs as follows: A person who could have profitably invested his money in a commercial enterprise loans it out to somebody who, in turn, makes a profit out of it. In such circumstances why should the borrower not pay the lender a part of the profit? Such people, however, disregard the fact that no enterprise in which a man participates, whether it is commercial, industrial or agricultural, and whether one participates in it with one's organizing skill or capital, or by both, is immune from risk. No enterprise carries absolutely guaranteed profit at a fixed rate. What is the justification, then, for the fact that out of all the people in the business world, the financier alone should be considered entitled to a profit at a fixed rate in all circumstances, and should be protected against all possibility of loss?

Let us set aside for a moment the questions of non-profitable loans and vacillations in the rate of profit. Let us consider only the question of loans for profitable enterprises, and confine our consideration to loans made at non-exorbitant rates of interest. The question, however, remains: Which rational principle, which logic, which canon of justice and which sound economic principle can justify that those who spend their time, energy, capacity and resources, and whose effort and skill make a business thrive, are not guaranteed profit at any fixed rate, whereas those who merely lend out their funds are fully secured against all risks of loss and are guaranteed profit at a fixed rate? And which principle can justify the fact that a man lends out his funds to an industrial concern and fixes, say for the next twenty years, that he will be entitled to receive each year a given per cent interest on his capital, while the proprietors of the industrial concern have no means of foretelling the price changes affecting their commodity, and hence their profit? Let us consider another case, namely that of war loans. How can it be appropriate that all classes of people endure all kinds of losses and are exposed to all kinds of risks and dangers connected with war, whereas the financiers, simply by having made loans, continue to receive interest on them for long periods of time, sometimes even for a whole century?

► *Translation continued on next page.*

Hence, whosoever receives this admonition from his Lord, and then gives up (taking interest), may keep his previous gains, and it will be for Allah to judge him.[319] Whoever reverts to it, they are the people of the Fire, and there they shall abide.

فَمَن جَآءَهُۥ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ فَٱنتَهَىٰ فَلَهُۥ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُۥٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿٢٧٥﴾

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318. The essential difference between non-interest business transactions and interest-bearing transactions rests on the following grounds:

(1) In ordinary business transactions there occurs a mutually equitable exchange of benefits between the buyer and the seller. The buyer derives benefit from the article which he purchases from the seller; the seller receives compensation for the effort, ingenuity and time spent on making the article available to the buyer. In interest-bearing transactions, on the other hand, the exchange of benefits does not take place equitably. The interest receiving party receives a fixed amount as a payment for using the loan he advances and thus his gain is secured. The other party to the transaction has only one thing at his disposal – a period of time during which he can make use of the funds loaned, and which may not always yield a profit. If such a person spends the borrowed funds on consumption, there is obviously no question of profit. Even if the funds are invested in trade, agriculture or industry, one stands the chance both of making a profit and of incurring a loss during the period of time in question. Hence an interest-bearing transaction entails either a loss on one side and a profit on the other, or an assured and fixed profit on one side and an uncertain and unspecified profit on the other.

(2) In business enterprises the profit that a person makes, however large it may be, is made only once. The person who lends out money on interest receives, on the contrary, an on-going profit which multiplies with the passage of time. Moreover, however large the extent of the profit made by the borrower from the loaned money it will still be within certain limits, while the claims of the lender in return for this profit are unlimited. It is even possible that the lender may seize the entire turnover of the borrower if he defaults on payment, thus depriving him of all the resources from which he makes his living. It is also possible that even after the lender has seized all the property of the borrower, his claims will still remain unsatisfied.

(3) In a business deal, the transaction ends with the exchange between a commodity and its price. After this exchange has taken place, no obligation remains on either party towards the other. If the transaction is that of rent, the thing rented (e.g. land or building) is not consumed but is rather used and remains intact, and is returned to the owner after a stipulated period of time. In a transaction involving interest, however, what actually happens is that the borrower first spends the loaned funds, then reclaims them with his efforts, returning them to the lender together with a surplus.

(4) In agriculture and industry, and in trade and commerce, one makes a profit after having expended one's effort, intelligence and time. In an interest-bearing transaction, on the contrary, one becomes entitled to a sizeable share in the earnings of others without any toil and effort, by merely allowing someone to make use of one's surplus money. The lender is neither a 'partner' in the technical sense of the term, for he does not share both the profit and the loss, nor is his share in proportion to the actual profit.

There is thus a tremendous difference from an economic point of view between business transactions as such and interest-bearing transactions. Whereas the former plays a highly constructive role in human society, the latter leads to its corrosion. This is in addition to its moral implications. By its very nature interest breeds meanness, selfishness, apathy and cruelty towards others. It leads to the worship of money and destroys fellow-feeling and a spirit of altruistic co-operation between man and man. Thus it is ruinous for mankind from both an economic and a moral viewpoint.

319. What is said here is not that man will be pardoned by God for the interest taken in the past, but that it is for God to judge him. The expression: 'may keep his previous gains' does not signify absolute pardon from God for the interest one has taken, rather it points to the legal concession that has been made. It only means that no legal claim will be made for the interest taken in the past. For were such claims to be entertained, an endless succession of litigation would ensue. From a moral point of view, however, the earnings made by way of interest would continue to be impure. If a person is really God-fearing and if his economic and moral viewpoint has really undergone a change under the influence of Islam, he will try to abstain from spending on himself the income which he has obtained by illegitimate means. He will also try to seek out those from whom he has derived illegitimate earnings and will try to return those earnings to such people; if he is unable to locate them, he will try to spend them on collective welfare rather than on himself. It is this conduct alone which can save him from the punishment of God. As for one who continues to enjoy his illegitimate earnings, it is not unlikely that he will be subjected to God's punishment.

(276) Allah deprives interest of all blessing, whereas He blesses charity with growth.[320] ►

يَمْحَقُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرِّبَوٰا۟ وَيُرْبِى ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ

320. The fact stated in this verse is a truism from a moral and spiritual as well as from an economic and social viewpoint. For, although wealth apparently multiplies through interest and shrinks as a result of charity, in actual fact the opposite is the case. By God's decree, the law of nature is such that interest not only serves as a strain on moral and spiritual well-being, and social and economic growth, it also causes actual regression and decline. Charity, however, (including such acts as lending money to people with the stipulation that they should return it if they can, and at their convenience) leads to the growth and expansion of man's moral and spiritual qualities and to the growth of human society and economy.

Looked at from moral and spiritual standpoints, it is evident that interest is not only the outcome of selfishness, miserliness and callousness but also encourages their growth. Charity, on the other hand, is the outcome of generosity, compassion, large-heartedness and magnanimity, with the result that the more one practises charity the more these qualities develop. It is obvious that if there is a society whose individuals are selfish in their dealings with one another, in which none is prepared to assist the other without self-interest, in which every person considers the other's need an opportunity to capitalize and exploit, in which the interests of the rich are directly opposed to the interests of the common people, that society does not rest on stable foundations. In such a society, instead of love and compassion there is bound to grow mutual spite and bitterness, apathy, indifference and callousness. The elements which compose such a society are bound to remain inclined towards disintegration and chaos; acute internal conflict and strife are sure to occur.

Contrast this with the society which is based on mutual sympathy and co-operation, whose individuals deal with one another magnanimously, in which, when a person is in need, people willingly come forward to accord generous help, in which the 'haves' assist the 'have-nots' with compassion and at least engage in just and equitable co-operation. In such a society mutual cordiality, goodwill and fellow-feeling are bound to flourish. The various components of such a society will be closely knit together and prove a source of mutual support. In such a society internal conflict and strife will make few inroads. Also, owing to mutual co-operation and goodwill the pace of development should be faster than in the other kind of society.

Let us now look at the matter from an economic viewpoint, from which interest-bearing loans are seen to be of two kinds. The first category consists of loans incurred by people in genuine need, who are compelled to borrow for their personal consumption requirements. The second consists of the

► *Translation continued on page 219.*

loans incurred by businessmen for investment in trade and industry or agriculture.

The first category is generally acknowledged to lead to ruin. Nevertheless, there is not one country in the world where financiers and financial institutions are not sucking the blood of poor labourers, peasants and ordinary low-income people through interest on consumption loans. The burden of interest makes it extremely difficult, often impossible, for borrowers to pay off the original loan. They may even have to resort to fresh borrowing from elsewhere to pay if off. Because of the way interest works, the sum outstanding against them often remains even after they have paid twice or three times its amount in interest. The bulk of the income of labourers is snatched away from them by lenders, leaving them without enough for the bare necessities of life for themselves and their families. This situation steadily erodes their interest in their jobs. For if someone else is to reap the benefit of a man's hard work. why should he work hard at all? Moreover, oppressed by the worries of debt, the health and strength of labourers is gradually destroyed by undernourishment and lack of medical treatment.

In short, a minority of people continually fatten themselves by sucking the blood of millions of ordinary people, but the total production level of the people remains much lower than its optimum potential. Ultimately, of course, these exploiters are seldom spared the evil consequences of their actions. Their callous selfishness causes such widespread misery among the masses that anger and resentment against the rich smoulder in their hearts ready to erupt in times of revolutionary unrest. The exploiters then have to pay very dearly: their ill-earned riches are not only wrested from them, they are either killed mercilessly or subjected to ignominy and humiliation.

The second category of loans, those invested in productive enterprises, also cause harm because of the infliction of a predetermined rate of interest on such borrowings. The most significant are the following:

(1) Projects which do not promise a higher rate of profit than the current rate of interest fail to attract sufficient funds, no matter how useful and necessary they may be from the viewpoint of larger national interests. Loanable funds flow towards those business enterprises which are likely to yield at least the same, if not a higher rate of profit on investments than the current rate of interest, even though they may be of very little or no benefit to the nation at large.

(2) There can be no guarantee that a business investment, whether it is in trade, industry or agriculture, will always yield a rate of profit which is higher than the rate of interest. Not only can there be no such assurance, there can never be an assurance about any business that it will always remain profitable. What really happens, therefore, is that the financier is assured interest at a predetermined rate whereas the business in which the loan is invested is exposed to risk and possible losses.

And Allah loves none who is ungrateful and persists in sin.[321] (277) Truly those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish Prayer and pay Purifying Alms (*Zakāh*) – will find that their reward is with their Lord, and that they have no reason to entertain fear or grief.[322]

وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٢٧٦﴾ إِنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
وَأَقَامُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَوُا۟ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ
لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٧﴾

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(3) Since the lender does not share the profit and loss of the business but lends out funds on the assurance of a fixed rate of interest, he is in no way concerned with the fortunes of the business itself. He is solely concerned, and in a totally selfish spirit, with his own pecuniary benefit. Hence, whenever the lender senses the faintest sign of depression, he begins to withdraw money from the market. The result is that sometimes imaginary fears and anxieties spark off an actual depression in the economy. And if the economy is depressed owing to other factors, the excessive selfishness of the financiers tends to escalate the situation into a full-scale economic crisis. These three evils of interest are obvious to every student of economics. Can anyone then deny the truth of the Natural law enunciated by Allah that interest decreases the national economic wealth?

Let us now look at the economic effects of charity. Suppose the general attitude of the prosperous members of a society is that within the limits of their means they spend generously on the fulfilment of their own requirements and on the requirements of their family, and then devote the surplus to helping the poor. After that they either use their funds to provide interest-free loans to businessmen, invest them in business with the stipulation that they shall be co-sharers in both the profit and loss of the business, or deposit them with the government so that it may use them on projects of public welfare. A little reflection will make it obvious that trade, industry and agriculture in such a society will attain maximum prosperity; the standard of living of its people will continually rise and production in it will be much higher than in societies where economic activity is fettered by interest.

321. It is clear that only those who have a surplus of earnings over their basic requirements can lend out money at interest. This surplus, according to the Qur'ān, constitutes God's bounty. And true thankfulness for this bounty requires that a person should be bountiful towards other creatures of God even as the Creator has been to him. If, instead of doing this, the person tries to become richer at the expense of those whose present earnings are insufficient to meet their needs, he is at once guilty of ungratefulness to God, and blatantly unjust, cruel and wicked.

(278) Believers! Hold Allah in fear and give up all outstanding interest if you do truly believe. (279) But if you do not do so, then be warned of war from Allah and His Messenger.[323] If you repent even now, you have the right of the return of your capital; neither will you do wrong nor will you be wronged. ►

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ
وَذَرُوا۟ مَا بَقِىَ مِنَ ٱلرِّبَوٰٓا۟ إِن كُنتُم
مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٧٨﴾ فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا۟ فَأْذَنُوا۟
بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِۦ ۖ وَإِن تُبْتُمْ
فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ
لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٩﴾

322. In this section God brings into sharp relief two contrasting characters. One is selfish, Mammon-worshipping, a kind of Shylock. He is totally preoccupied with making and accumulating money in total disregard of his obligations to God and his fellow-beings. He counts the money he has saved and is so consumed by the desire to see it multiply that he spends much time estimating how much it will grow in the weeks, months and years to come. The other character is a God-worshipping, generous and compassionate person, ever conscious of the claims of both God and man, ready to spend whatever he earns by the sweat of his brow on himself as well as on other human beings, and devotes a good part of it to philanthropic purposes.

The first character is strongly denounced by God. No healthy society can exist on the basis of such men, and in the Hereafter, too, they are destined to meet grief and affliction, torment and misery. The latter, by contrast, is a character highly extolled by God, a character which will serve as the basis of a sound and healthy society in this world and will lead man to salvation in the Next.

323. This verse was revealed after the conquest of Makka and has been placed here because of its contextual relevance. Although interest was considered objectionable earlier, it had not been legally prohibited. After the revelation of this verse interest-bearing transactions became a punishable offence within the realm of Islam. The Prophet (peace be on him) warned the Arab tribes through his officials that war would be declared against them if they did not give up interest-bearing transactions. It was specified, for instance, in the agreement under which the Christians of Najrān were granted internal autonomy under the suzerainty of the Islamic state, that if they continued to use interest, the agreement with them would be considered void and their action an act of belligerency. On the basis of the last words of the verse, Ibn 'Abbās, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn Sīrīn and Rabī' ibn Anas are of the view that anyone who takes interest within the

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(280) But if the debtor is in straitened circumstance, let him have respite until the time of ease; and whatever you remit by way of charity, it is better for you, if only you know.[324] (281) And beware of the Day when you shall return to Allah, and every human being shall be fully repaid for whatever (good or evil) he has done, and none shall be wronged.

(282) Believers! Whenever you contract a debt from one another[325] for a known term, commit it to writing.[326]

وَإِن كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ وَأَن تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨٠﴾ وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨١﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنتُم بِدَيْنٍ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ

boundaries of the Islamic State (*Dār al-Islām*) should be pressed to repudiate the transaction and recant and, if he persists, should be put to death. Others consider it sufficient to imprison such people and keep them in prison until they pledge to give up taking interest. (See Jaṣṣāṣ's commentary on verse 2: 278; see especially vol. 1, pp. 471 f. – Ed.)

324. This verse is the basis of the Islamic regulation that if a person has become incapable of paying off his debt, the court will force the creditors to grant him respite for payment. In fact, under certain circumstances, the court is entitled to remit a part of his debt and, at times, the whole of it. It is mentioned in the Ḥadīth that once a person suffered loss in his trade and became greatly burdened with debt and the case was brought to the notice of the Prophet. The Prophet urged the people to help their brother in his distress. They came to his assistance but the amount of help was not enough to wipe out his debts. Then the Prophet approached the lenders and asked them to accept whatever amount was available and to grant remission to the borrower because of his inability to make further payments. Muslim jurists have made it clear that a debtor's residential house, eating utensils, clothes and the tools which he uses for earning his livelihood may not be confiscated in any circumstances whatsoever for non-payment of loans. (For relevant discussion and textual evidence see the commentaries on this verse in Ibn Kathīr, Jaṣṣāṣ, and Qurṭubī – Ed.)

Let a scribe write it down between you justly, and the scribe may not refuse to write it down according to what Allah has taught him; so let him write, and let the debtor dictate; and let him fear Allah, his Lord, and curtail no part of it. If the debtor be weak of mind or body, or incapable of dictating, let his guardian dictate justly, and call upon two of your men[327] as witnesses; if two men are not there, then let there be one man and two women as witnesses from among those acceptable to you[328] so that if one of the two women should make a mistake, the other might remind her. ►

وَلْيَكْتُب بَّيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌۢ بِٱلْعَدْلِ
وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ أَن يَكْتُبَ كَمَا
عَلَّمَهُ ٱللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ وَلْيُمْلِلِ
ٱلَّذِى عَلَيْهِ ٱلْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ ٱللَّهَ رَبَّهُۥ
وَلَا يَبْخَسْ مِنْهُ شَيْـًٔا ۚ فَإِن كَانَ ٱلَّذِى
عَلَيْهِ ٱلْحَقُّ سَفِيهًا أَوْ ضَعِيفًا
أَوْ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَن يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلْيُمْلِلْ
وَلِيُّهُۥ بِٱلْعَدْلِ ۚ وَٱسْتَشْهِدُوا۟ شَهِيدَيْنِ
مِن رِّجَالِكُمْ ۖ فَإِن لَّمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ
فَرَجُلٌ وَٱمْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرْضَوْنَ
مِنَ ٱلشُّهَدَآءِ أَن تَضِلَّ إِحْدَىٰهُمَا
فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَىٰهُمَا ٱلْأُخْرَىٰ

325. This is the basis of the rule that the time for the repayment of a loan should be fixed at the time when the loan is transacted.

326. When friends and relatives borrow from one another it is generally considered unseemly either to commit these loans to writing, or to have them attested by witnesses. Such an act is considered a sign of distrust. But God enjoins that whenever loans or business transactions take place, their conditions should be recorded in black and white and should be attested by witnesses so that there remains no ground for misunderstanding or dispute. It is mentioned in the Ḥadīth that three kinds of people who air their grievances to God go unheeded. The first is the man who does not divorce his wife despite her being of bad character. The second is the guardian of the orphan who hands over the latter's property to him before his having attained the age of majority. The third is he who loans out his money to a person without making anyone a witness to that transaction. (Cited by Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 481; also Ibn Kathīr, in commentary on 4: 5, citing this as a Tradition from Abū Mūsá al-Ash'arī mentioned by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī – Ed.)

327. That is, from among Muslim males. This shows that wherever one has a choice, one should appoint only Muslims as one's witnesses. In the

► *Translation continued on next page.*

Let not the witnesses refuse when they are summoned (to give evidence). Do not show slackness in writing down the transactions, whether small or large, along with the date of its payment. That is fairest in the sight of Allah; it is the best for testimony and is more likely to exclude all doubts. If it be a matter of buying and selling on the spot, it is not blameworthy if you do not write it down;[329] but do take witnesses when you settle commercial transactions with one another. And the scribe or the witness may be done no harm.[330] It will be sinful if you do so. Beware of the wrath of Allah. He teaches you the right way and has full knowledge of everything.

وَلَا يَأْبَ ٱلشُّهَدَآءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُوا۟ۚ
وَلَا تَسْـَٔمُوٓا۟ أَن تَكْتُبُوهُ صَغِيرًا أَوْ
كَبِيرًا إِلَىٰٓ أَجَلِهِۦۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَقْسَطُ
عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ لِلشَّهَـٰدَةِ وَأَدْنَىٰٓ أَلَّا
تَرْتَابُوٓا۟ۖ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَ تِجَـٰرَةً
حَاضِرَةً تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيْنَكُمْ فَلَيْسَ
عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَلَّا تَكْتُبُوهَاۗ
وَأَشْهِدُوٓا۟ إِذَا تَبَايَعْتُمْۚ وَلَا يُضَآرَّ
كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌۚ وَإِن تَفْعَلُوا۟
فَإِنَّهُۥ فُسُوقٌۢ بِكُمْۗ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَۖ
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ ٱللَّهُۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ
شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨٢﴾

case of non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic State (*ahl al-Dhimmah*), however, they may appoint witnesses from among themselves.

328. What is implied is that every Tom, Dick or Harry is not worthy of acting as a witness. Rather, persons of high integrity enjoying public credibility should be appointed as witnesses.

329. The purpose of this directive is to stress that it is better for even day-to-day sales to be written down, as has become customary nowadays (viz. the issuance of invoices). Such a procedure, however, has not been made obligatory. Likewise, it is not objectionable if neighbouring shopkeepers do not record the frequent transactions that take place between them.

330. This means that no person should be compelled to write the document or be its witness. It also means that no party of a dispute should persecute either a scribe or witness for witnessing against the interests of that party.

(283) And if you are on a journey and do not find a scribe to write the document then resort to taking pledges in hand.[331]

But if any of you trusts another, let him who is trusted fulfil the trust, and fear Allah, his Lord.

And do not conceal what you have witnessed,[332] for whoever conceals it, his heart is sinful. Allah has full knowledge of all that you do.

۞ وَإِن كُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ وَلَمْ تَجِدُوا
كَاتِبًا فَرِهَٰنٌ مَّقْبُوضَةٌ ۖ فَإِنْ أَمِنَ
بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا فَلْيُؤَدِّ الَّذِى اؤْتُمِنَ
أَمَٰنَتَهُۥ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُۥ ۗ وَلَا تَكْتُمُوا
الشَّهَٰدَةَ ۚ وَمَن يَكْتُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُۥٓ
ءَاثِمٌ قَلْبُهُۥ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ
﴿٢٨٣﴾

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331. This does not mean that pledge transactions are confined to journeys alone. These transactions have been specially mentioned in the context of journeys because during journeys people often have to resort to pledge transactions. Moreover, it has not been laid down that pledge transactions may be entered into only when a scribe is not available to write down the transaction. It is also permissible, if the lender is not satisfied merely with the written promise of the repayment of the loan, for the borrower to seek a loan by pledging some property to the lender. But since the Qur'ān urges its followers to be generous in their dealings, and since it is inconsistent with high standards of moral excellence not to make loans to needy persons without keeping some property in custody, the Qur'ān has abstained from mentioning this form of dealing even though it is permissible.

It should also be noted that the purpose of taking a pledge is merely to assure the lender the return of his loan. He has no right at all to benefit from the pledged property. If a person lives, say, either in the building which has been pledged, or pockets its rent, he is guilty of taking interest. There is no essential difference between charging interest directly and using the pledged property. If, however, either cattle or beasts of burden have been pledged, they can be milked and used for transport in lieu of the fodder that one provides them during the period of custody.

332. Concealing true evidence applies both to a person not appearing to give evidence and to his avoidance of stating facts.

(284) All that is in the heavens[333] and the earth belongs to Allah.[334] Whether you disclose whatever is in your heart or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it,[335] and then will forgive whomever He wills, and will chastise whomever He wills. Allah has power over everything.[336]

(285) The Messenger believes, and so do the believers, in the guidance sent down upon him from his Lord: each one believes in Allah, and in His angels, and in His Books, and in His Messengers. They say: 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers. We hear and obey. Our Lord! Grant us Your forgiveness; to You we are destined to return.'[337]

لِّلَّهِ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ وَإِن
تُبْدُوا۟ مَا فِيٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ
يُحَاسِبْكُم بِهِ ٱللَّهُ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ
وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ
شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾ ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ
أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ
ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ
لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِۦ
وَقَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ
رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

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333. These are the concluding observations on the subject. Just as this *sūrah* opened with an enunciation of the basic teachings of religion, so the fundamentals upon which Islam rests are reiterated in the concluding section of the *sūrah*. It is useful to go through the first section of this *sūrah* (see verses 1–5) while reading these concluding verses.

334. This is the first fundamental principle of Islam. That God is the Sovereign of the heavens and the earth and all they contain, and that it is improper for man not to bend himself in obedience and service to God.

335. This sentence mentions two other matters. First, that man is individually responsible to, and answerable before, God. Second, that the Lord of the heavens and the earth, before Whom man is answerable, is All-Knowing. Thus, nothing is concealed from Him, not even intentions and thoughts which lie hidden deep in the hearts and minds of people.

(286) Allah does not lay a responsibility on anyone beyond his capacity.[338] In his favour shall be whatever good each one does, and against him whatever evil he does.[339] (Believers! Pray thus to your Lord): 'Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or commit mistakes.

لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ
لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا ٱكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ
رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَآ إِن نَّسِينَآ أَوْ
أَخْطَأْنَا ۚ

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336. This refers to God's absolute authority. He is not bound by laws framed by others which might limit Him to operating in a certain manner. He is an absolute sovereign and has the full power either to punish or pardon people.

337. This verse outlines what one is required to believe in and what should be the distinguishing characteristics of one's conduct. They consist of the following: belief in God, in His angels, in His Books, in *all* His Messengers (instead of some rather than others), and in the fact that ultimately one will have to stand before God's judgement. These are the five fundamental articles of faith in Islam. Having accepted them, the only proper attitude for a Muslim is to cheerfully accept and follow whatever directives he receives from God. Instead of exulting in his moral excellence he should be humble and should constantly seek God's forgiveness and mercy.

338. Man's answerability to God is limited by the extent of his ability. If a man does not have the ability to do a certain thing, God will not take him to task for not having performed it. In the same way, if it is really beyond a man's ability to abstain from something, God will not blame him for having failed to abstain from it. It should be noted here that man will not be the final judge as to whether he had the ability to do something or not. Such judgement will be made by God alone.

339. This is the second fundamental principle of God's law of retribution. Every man will be rewarded for the services he has rendered, none will be rewarded for services rendered by others. The same applies to punishment. It is the one who is guilty who will be punished. It is possible, however, that if a man has initiated either good or bad practices, they will continue to affect people's lives. The resulting good and bad deeds of people will be reckoned either to their credit or against them, since they are clearly related to their efforts and actions. It is impossible, however, that a

Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden such as You laid on those gone before us.[340] Our Lord! Lay not on us burdens which we do not have the power to bear.[341] And overlook our faults, and forgive us, and have mercy upon us. You are our Guardian; grant us victory, then, against the unbelieving folk.'[342]

رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَآ إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِۦ ۖ وَٱعْفُ عَنَّا وَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا وَٱرْحَمْنَآ ۚ أَنتَ مَوْلَىٰنَا فَٱنصُرْنَا عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ٢٨٦

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man should be either rewarded for an act of goodness or punished for an act of evil in which he has had no share – neither by intent nor practical action. The requital of acts is not transferable.

340. The prayer made here is that God should not subject them to the severe tests and the terrible persecutions and hardships undergone by their predecessors. It is God's law that those who commit themselves to follow Truth and righteousness are subjected to severe tests and tribulations, and it is a believer's duty to meet them with patience and fortitude. At the same time, the believer should always pray that God may make it easy for him to follow the path of Truth and righteousness.

341. Believers pray to God not to place upon them a burden beyond their capacity of endurance, and to subject them only to those tests from which they may emerge triumphant. May it not happen that the hardships are too much for them to bear, and that their feet falter and are turned away from the path of righteousness.

342. In order to appreciate fully the spirit of this prayer, one should remember that these verses were revealed on the occasion of the ascension of the Prophet, a year before his migration to Madina. At that time the struggle between Islam and unbelief had reached its climax. Not only in Makka, but throughout the Arabian peninsula, there was no place where the lives of those who wished to follow the religion of God had not been made extremely difficult. In these circumstances the Muslims were told in what manner they ought to pray to their Lord. It is obvious that if the bestower himself tells one how to present one's request, the granting of the request becomes virtually assured. Hence, this prayer greatly strengthened the hearts of the Muslims. Moreover, this prayer implicitly taught the Muslims not to allow their feelings to flow along undesirable channels. They should instead mould them into a prayer to their Lord.

Think of the heart-rending cruelties to which the Muslims were subjected merely because of their devotion to Truth, and then turn to the contents of this prayer, where there is no trace of bitterness against the enemies. Consider the physical afflictions and material losses which the Muslims suffered, then note how this prayer does not contain the slightest hint of worldly ambition. Compare the wretchedness and misery of these devotees of Truth with the pure, exalted feelings with which this prayer is overflowing. This comparison will enable us to appreciate the nature of the spiritual and moral training provided to men of faith.

Sūrah 3

Āl 'Imrān

(Madinan Period)

Title

The house of 'Imrān is mentioned once in this *sūrah* and has symbolically been chosen as its title.

Period of Revelation

This *sūrah* comprises four discourses. The first discourse runs from the beginning of the *sūrah* till verse 32, and was probably revealed not long after the Battle of Badr. The second opens with 3: 33: 'Truly Allah chose Adam, Noah, the descendants of Abraham and of 'Imrān over all mankind', and continues to 3: 63. This was revealed in 9 A.H. at the time of the deputation of Christians from Najrān. The third opens with 3: 64 and concludes with 3: 120. The period of its revelation is approximately the same as that of the first discourse. The fourth runs from 3: 121 to the end of the *sūrah*. It was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud.

Subject Matter and Central Theme

These various discourses are permeated by a unity of purpose and theme. The *sūrah* is addressed in the main to two groups: the People of the Book (i.e. the Jews and Christians), and those who believe in Muḥammad (peace be on him) as God's message-bearer.

In this *sūrah* the first of these groups is admonished, along the same lines as in *Sūrah* 2. They are censured for their doctrinal errors and moral corruption, and are told that the Prophet (peace be on him) and the Qur'ān invite them to the same true religion preached by the Prophets from the earliest times. The deviant course they have adopted is inconsistent with the very scriptures which they themselves acknowledge to be of Divine origin. They ought, therefore, to accept the Truth now placed before them by Muḥammad (peace be on him).

Further directives, similar to those found in *Sūrah* 2, are addressed to the second group of people (the Muslims), since they are proclaimed to be the 'best nation'. (Qur'ān 3: 109 – Ed.) In this capacity the Muslims are required to be the standard-bearers of the Truth, and are made responsible for the reform of the world. The Jews' and Christians' record of religious and moral degeneration is placed before them as a warning. They are told how they should act as a nation devoted to bringing about reforms in the world, and how to deal with the People of the Book and the hypocrites who place all kinds of obstructions in the way of God. Moreover, their attention is drawn to the need to reform themselves, and to root out the weaknesses which came to light during the Battle of Badr.

This *sūrah* is thus not only characterized by a unity of theme and inner coherence, but also appears so intimately related to *Sūrah* 2 that it can be considered a logical supplement to it.

Historical Background

At about the time this *sūrah* was revealed, the followers of the Prophet (peace be on him) had already encountered fierce trials and tribulations, the advent of which had been foretold in *Sūrah* 2. Even though the believers had won a victory at Badr, a hornet's nest had been disturbed, in that all those forces in Arabia hostile to the new movement were alerted. The Muslims were in a state of unease and fear. It seemed that the small town of Madina, which endured the wrath of most of the neighbouring societies, might be wiped out completely. The situation also aggravated the town's economic position, not least because of the dislocation and imbalance caused by the large influx of immigrants.

The Jewish tribes around Madina were in no way disposed to honour the agreements they had concluded with the Prophet (peace be on him) after his migration from Makka. At the time of the Battle of Badr their sympathies clearly lay with the idol-worshipping

polytheists rather than with the Muslims who believed in the One True God, in Prophethood, in the Divine Scriptures and in the After-life. After the Battle of Badr these tribes openly promoted the Quraysh and other Arab tribes to avenge themselves on the Muslims. In particular the chief of Banū Naḍīr, Ka'b b. al-Ashraf had carried his manoeuvres to the point of implacable hostility and downright treachery. Leaving aside all other considerations, the Jews had disregarded the centuries-old friendship and good neighbourliness which had existed between them and the people of Madina.

Finally, their brazen violation of treaty obligations exceeded all reasonable limits. A few months after the Battle of Badr, the Prophet (peace be on him) launched an attack upon Banū Qaynuqā', the most hostile of the Jewish tribes, and banished them from the outskirts of Madina. This inflamed the animosity of the remaining Jewish tribes, who began to hatch conspiracies in collaboration with the hypocrites of Madina and the polytheistic tribes of the Ḥijāz, so much so that people feared a murderous assault on the Prophet (peace be on him). The situation was so alarming that the Companions kept their weapons at their sides day and night, and a constant vigil was maintained. If the Prophet (peace be on him) ventured out of sight for any length of time the Companions launched a search immediately.

The Quraysh were smarting from the defeat of Badr, and the Jewish efforts to arouse their feelings of revenge were like pouring oil on flames. Within a year they attacked Madina again with an army of three thousand. This was the Battle of Uḥud (named after the mountain in the valley of which it was fought). A thousand Madinans accompanied by the Prophet engaged the invading army. Three hundred of these, (the hypocrites), however, cut themselves off from the army of the Prophet and returned to Madina. Even among the seven hundred left with the Prophet (peace be on him) there was still a small group of hypocrites who did their best to demoralize the Muslim ranks during the course of the battle. This was the first occasion when the problem of enemies within their own ranks became manifest to the Muslims.

Although the machinations of the hypocrites contributed a good deal to the setback suffered by the Muslims in the Battle of Uḥud, their own weaknesses also played an equal role. It should be recalled, however, that the Muslims had not been a group for long, and had been organized on the basis of a common devotion to a faith and ideology, and a shared commitment to follow a set of principles. A process of moral instruction and discipline was in operation, but had

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

(1) *Alif, Lām, Mīm.* (2) Allah, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting, Who sustains the entire order of the universe – there is no God but He.[1]

(3) He has revealed this Book to you, setting forth the truth and confirming the earlier Books, and earlier He revealed the Torah and Gospel (4) for the guidance of mankind;[2] and He has also revealed the Criterion (to distinguish truth from falsehood). A severe chastisement lies in store for those who deny the signs of Allah. Allah is All-Mighty; He is the Lord of Retribution.

1. For explanation see *Sūrah* 2, n. 278 above.

2. The Torah is generally taken to signify the first five books of the Old Testament, and the *Injīl* (Gospel), to mean the four Gospels of the New Testament, even though those books form a part of it. This has sometimes caused people to wonder if these books were indeed revealed by God. If they are accepted as revealed, one may wonder if the Qur'ān really verifies their contents as this verse says. The fact is, however, that the Torah is not identical with the first five books of the Old Testament even though those books form a part of the Torah. Likewise, the *Injīl* is not identical with the four Gospels of the New Testament.

The fact is that the Torah, in the Qur'ānic usage, signifies the revelations made to Moses (peace be on him), in about forty years, from the time he was appointed a Prophet until his death. These include the 'Ten Commandments', which were handed over to him inscribed on stone tablets. Moses took down the rest of the revealed injunctions and handed over one copy to each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and one copy to the Levites for safe keeping. It is

this book which was known as the Torah and it existed until the first destruction of Jerusalem. The copy entrusted to the Levites was put beside the Ark of the Covenant along with the Commandment tablets, and the Israelites knew it as the Torah. The Jews, however, neglected the Book: during the reign of Josiah the King of Judah the Temple of Solomon was under repair and the high priest, Hilkiah, chanced to find the Book lying in the construction area. He gave it to the King's secretary, Shaphan, who in turn took it to the King as if it were a strange find (see 2 Kings 22: 8–13).

Hence, when the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem and razed it and the Temple of Solomon to the ground, the Israelites lost for ever the few original copies of the Torah which they possessed, and which they had consigned to obscurity. At the time of Ezra the priest, some Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon, and when Jerusalem was rebuilt the entire history of Israel, which now comprises the first seventeen books of the Old Testament, was recorded by Ezra with the assistance of some other elders of the community. Four of these books, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, consist of a biographical narrative of Moses. In this biography those verses of the Torah available to Ezra and the other elders are also recorded and in the contexts in which they were revealed. The present Torah, therefore, comprises those fragments of the original book which are interspersed throughout the biography of Moses (composed in the manner described above).

In locating these fragments of the original Torah there are certain expressions which help us. These are interspersed between the different pieces of biographical narration and usually open with words such as: 'Then the Lord said to Moses', and 'Moses said, the Lord your God commands you.' These expressions, then, are fragments of the original Torah. When the biographical narration re-commences, however, we can be sure that the fragment of the true Torah has concluded. Wherever authors and editors of the Bible have added anything of their own accord, by way of either elaboration or elucidation, it has become very difficult for an ordinary reader to distinguish the original from the explanatory additions. Those with insight into Divine Scripture, however, do have the capacity to distinguish between the original revealed fragments and the later, human interpolations.

It is these scattered fragments of the original revealed Book which the Qur'ān terms as the Torah, and it is these which it confirms. When these fragments are compared with the Qur'ān, there is no difference between the two as regards the fundamental teachings. Whatever differences exist relate to legal matters and are of secondary importance. Even today a careful reader can appreciate that the Torah and the Qur'ān have sprung from one and the same Divine source.

Likewise, *Injīl* signifies the inspired orations and utterances of Jesus (peace be on him), which he delivered during the last two or three years of his life in his capacity as a Prophet. There are no certain means by which

(5) Nothing in the earth and in the heavens is hidden from Allah.[3] (6) It is He Who fashions you in the wombs as He wills.[4] There is no God but He; the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. ►

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَىْءٌ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِى ٱلسَّمَآءِ ﴿٥﴾ هُوَ ٱلَّذِى يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَآءُ ۚ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦﴾

we can definitively establish whether or not his statements were recorded during his lifetime. It is possible that some people took notes of them and that some followers committed them to memory. After a period of time, however, several treatises on the life of Jesus were written. The authors of these treatises recorded, in connection with the biographical account, those sayings of his which they had received from the previous generation of co-religionists, in the form of either oral traditions or written notes about events in his life. As a result the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not identical with the *Injīl*. Rather, the *Injīl* consists of those statements by Jesus which form part of these Gospels. Unfortunately we have no means of distinguishing the fragments of the original *Injīl* from the pieces written by the authors themselves. All we can say is that only those sections explicitly attributed to Jesus, for example in statements such as: 'And Jesus said' and 'And Jesus taught', constitute the true *Injīl*. It is the totality of such fragments which is designated as the *Injīl* by the Qur'ān, and it is the teachings contained in these fragments that the Qur'ān confirms. If these fragments are put together and compared with the teachings of the Qur'ān one notices very few discrepancies between the two, and any discrepancies that are found can be resolved easily by unbiased reflection.

3. That is, God knows all the facts of the universe. Hence the Book which He has revealed is, of necessity, true. It may be more appropriate to say that the unadulterated Truth can be made available to man only through this Book, which has been revealed by the All-Knowing, All-Wise God.

4. This refers to two important facts. The first is that no being knows human nature as well as God does; it is thus imperative that man should depend on the guidance revealed by God, something man needs the most. The second is that the Being Who takes care of all of man's requirements, major and minor, from the time of conception onwards, will not fail to provide guidance for man's conduct in this life.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(7) It is He Who has revealed the Book to you. Some of its verses are absolutely clear and lucid, and these are the core of the Book.[5] Others are ambiguous.[6] Those in whose hearts there is perversity, always go about the part which is ambiguous, seeking mischief and seeking to arrive at its meaning arbitrarily, although none knows their true meaning except Allah. On the contrary, those firmly rooted in knowledge say: 'We believe in it; it is all from our Lord alone.'[7] No one derives true admonition from anything except the men of understanding. ►

هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِنْهُ
ءَايَٰتٌ مُّحْكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ
مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٌ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ
فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَٰبَهَ مِنْهُ ٱبْتِغَآءَ ٱلْفِتْنَةِ
وَٱبْتِغَآءَ تَأْوِيلِهِۦ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا
ٱللَّهُ وَٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِى ٱلْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ ءَامَنَّا
بِهِۦ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِندِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّآ أُو۟لُوا۟
ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿٧﴾

5. *Muḥkam* means that which has been made firmly and perfectly. The *muḥkam* verses mentioned here are those Qur'ānic verses which are embodied in clear and lucid language and whose meaning is not liable to any ambiguity and equivocation. The words of these verses are clear pointers to their true meaning and, therefore, it is difficult to subject them to arbitrary interpretation. Such verses form the core of the Holy Book; they are the verses which fulfil the true purpose for which the Qur'ān was revealed, and they invite the whole world to Islam. They embody admonition and instruction as well as the refutation of erroneous doctrines and the elucidation of the Right Way. They also contain the fundamentals of the true faith; teachings relating to belief, worship and morality, and mandatory duties and prohibitions. These are the verses which will guide the genuine seeker after Truth who turns to the Qur'ān in order to find out what he ought and ought not to do.

6. 'Ambiguous' verses are those whose meaning may have some degree of equivocation.

It is obvious that no way of life can be prescribed for man unless a certain amount of knowledge explaining the truth about the universe, about its

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(8) They pray to Allah: 'Our Lord! Do not let our hearts swerve towards crookedness after You have guided us to the right way, and bestow upon us Your mercy. Surely You, only You, are the Munificent Giver! (9) Our Lord! You surely will gather mankind together one Day, a Day about (the coming of which) there is no doubt. Surely Allah never goes against His promise.'

رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا
مِن لَّدُنكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنتَ الْوَهَّابُ ﴿٨﴾
رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ جَامِعُ النَّاسِ لِيَوْمٍ لَّا رَيْبَ
فِيهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ
﴿٩﴾

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origin and end, about man's position in it and other matters of similar importance, is intimated to him. It is also evident that the truths which lie beyond the range of human perception have always eluded and will continue to elude man; no words exist in the human vocabulary which either express or portray them. In speaking about such things, we necessarily resort to words and expressions generally employed in connection with tangible objects. In the Qur'ān, too, this kind of language is employed in relation to supernatural matters; the verses which have been characterized as 'ambiguous' refer to such matters.

At best, such expressions may serve to either bring man close to or enable him to formulate some view of reality, even if it is a faint one. The more one tries to determine the precise meaning of such verses, the more their ambiguities proliferate, and the more one is confronted with choosing between several plausible interpretations. All this is likely to alienate one progressively further away from the Truth instead of bringing one closer to it. Those who seek the Truth and do not hanker after the satisfaction of their egocentric quest for exotic superfluities, will be satisfied with the dim vision of reality derived from these verses. They will concentrate their attention instead on the clear and lucid 'core' verses of the Qur'ān. It will be left to those who are either out to make mischief and mislead people or who have an abnormal passion for superfluities to devote their attention to hair-splitting discussions about the contents of the 'ambiguous' verses.

7. This might give rise to an unnecessary problem: How can people believe in 'ambiguous' verses when the contents of these cannot be grasped?

(10) Those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their offspring will avail them at all against Allah, and it is they who will be the fuel of the Fire. (11) (To them shall happen) the like of what happened to the people of Pharaoh, and those before them. They rejected Our signs, so Allah seized them for their sins. Allah indeed is severe in punishment.

(12) Tell those who disbelieved:[8] 'You shall soon be overpowered and mustered to Hell – and that is an evil resting place!' ►

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَن تُغْنِىَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَٰلُهُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَـٰدُهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمْ وَقُودُ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٠﴾ كَدَأْبِ ءَالِ فِرْعَوْنَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَـٰتِنَا فَأَخَذَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ شَدِيدُ ٱلْعِقَابِ ﴿١١﴾ قُل لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ سَتُغْلَبُونَ وَتُحْشَرُونَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ ﴿١٢﴾

The fact is that a reasonable person will believe that the Qur'ān is the Book of God through his reading of its clear and lucid verses, rather than by learning fanciful interpretations of the ambiguous verses. Once so convinced, he is not likely to be worried by doubts and anxieties caused by the ambiguities of the verses concerned. One who seeks the Truth is satisfied with the obvious meaning of these verses, and wherever he encounters complications and ambiguities he abstains from pursuing their solution too far. Instead of wasting his time splitting hairs, he is content to believe in the things laid down in the Book of God, without seeking to know them precisely and in detail. He turns his attention, in the main, to questions of a practical nature.

8. For explanation see *Sūrah* 2, n. 161 above.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(13) You have already come across an instructive sign in the two hosts that encountered each other in battle (at Badr): one host fighting in the way of Allah, and the other that of unbelievers. They saw with their own eyes that one host was twice the number of the other.[9] But (the result of the battle has proved that) Allah succours with His victory whomsoever He wills. In this there is surely a lesson for all who have eyes to see.[10]

قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ ءَايَةٌ فِى فِئَتَيْنِ ٱلْتَقَتَا فِئَةٌ تُقَٰتِلُ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَأُخْرَىٰ كَافِرَةٌ يَرَوْنَهُم مِّثْلَيْهِمْ رَأْىَ ٱلْعَيْنِ وَٱللَّهُ يُؤَيِّدُ بِنَصْرِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَبْصَٰرِ ﴿١٣﴾

9. The actual disparity between the two armies was roughly three to one, but even a cursory glance was enough to tell the casual observer that the army of unbelievers was about twice as large as that of the believers.

10. The events and results of the Battle of Badr are briefly reviewed so as to bring home certain lessons to the Muslims. There are three important lessons to be learnt. First, the manner in which the believers and the unbelievers advanced to the battlefield clearly demonstrated the difference in the moral fibre of the two armies. In the army of the unbelievers, the soldiers held drinking parties and were entertained by the songs and dances of slave girls. The prevalent mood of that army was one of self-indulgence. On the other hand, piety, fear of God and moral restraint of the highest order characterized the Muslim army. The soldiers were busy in devotion and remembrance of God, to Whom they addressed all their prayers and supplication. It was obvious to anyone which army was fighting in God's cause. Second, the believers won a resounding victory against an army of unbelievers superior to them in numbers, and in the quality and the quantity of arms. So the victory clearly indicated which of the two armies enjoyed the support of God. Third, the outcome of the battle came as a shocking humiliation for those who, heedless of God's might, had been exulting in the strength of their arms and the number of their supporters. It came as a shock to such people when God subjected a tribe like the Quraysh, foremost in influence and power throughout Arabia, to an ignominious defeat at the hands of a few ill-equipped Makkan fugitives and peasants from Madina.

(14) Men are naturally tempted by the lure of women, children, treasures of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and plantations. These are the enjoyments in the life of this world; but with Allah lies a goodly abode to return to. (15) Say: 'Shall I tell you of things better than these? For the God-fearing there are, with their Lord, gardens beneath which rivers flow; there they will abide for ever, will have spouses of stainless purity[11] as companions, and will enjoy the good pleasure of Allah.' Allah thoroughly observes His servants.[12] (16) These are the ones who pray: 'Our Lord! We do indeed believe, so forgive us our sins and keep us safe from the chastisement of the Fire'; (17) men who are steadfast,[13] truthful, obedient, spend (in the way of Allah) and implore the forgiveness of Allah before daybreak.

زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ مِنَ
ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلْبَنِينَ وَٱلْقَنَٰطِيرِ
ٱلْمُقَنطَرَةِ مِنَ ٱلذَّهَبِ وَٱلْفِضَّةِ
وَٱلْخَيْلِ ٱلْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ
وَٱلْحَرْثِ ذَٰلِكَ مَتَٰعُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ
ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥ حُسْنُ ٱلْمَـَٔابِ
(١٤) ۞ قُلْ أَؤُنَبِّئُكُم بِخَيْرٍ مِّن
ذَٰلِكُمْ لِلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوْا۟ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ
جَنَّٰتٌ تَجْرِى مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ
خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَٰجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ
وَرِضْوَٰنٌ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرٌۢ
بِٱلْعِبَادِ (١٥) ٱلَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ
رَبَّنَآ إِنَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا فَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا
وَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ (١٦) ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ
وَٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ وَٱلْقَٰنِتِينَ
وَٱلْمُنفِقِينَ وَٱلْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ
بِٱلْأَسْحَارِ (١٧)

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11. For explanation see *Sūrah* 2, n. 27 above.

12. This shows that God neither showers His favours on people arbitrarily nor makes casual and superficial judgements. He knows full well the deeds and intentions of people. He also knows who merits His rewards and who does not.

13. That is, they are those who remain steadfast in the cause of Truth; who do not lose heart when they either suffer losses or are subjected to afflictions; who do not despair when they encounter reverses; who are not

(18) Allah Himself bears witness that there is no God but He;[14] and likewise do the angels and the men possessed of knowledge[15] bear witness in truth and justice that there is no God but He, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (19) The true religion with Allah is Islam.[16] The People of the Book adopted many different ways rather than follow the true way of Islam even after the knowledge of truth had reached them, and this merely to commit excesses against one another.[17] Let him who refuses to follow the ordinances and directives of Allah know that Allah is swift in His reckoning.

شَهِدَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَأُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْعِلْمِ قَآئِمًۢا بِٱلْقِسْطِ ۚ
لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ
﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّ ٱلدِّينَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْإِسْلَٰمُ ۗ
وَمَا ٱخْتَلَفَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْعِلْمُ بَغْيًۢا
بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩﴾

seduced by temptations. They are the ones who remain faithful to the Truth, even when it apparently stands no chance of prevailing (see also *Sūrah* 2, n. 60 above).

14. The testimony in question is from God Himself, Who knows directly all the realities of the universe, Who observes every existing thing without obstruction. It is the testimony of the One from Whose sight nothing is hidden, and who can be a better first-hand witness than He? His testimony is that no one but He is possessed of the attributes of godhead; no one has the power to govern the universe, and no one has the right to claim the rights which belong exclusively to God.

15. After God, the most trustworthy testimony is that of the angels, for they carry out the administration of the universe. The testimony of the angels, based on their own observations, is that the Will of God alone reigns supreme in the universe, and they turn to Him alone in the governance of the heavens and the earth. Moreover, all creatures possessing knowledge of reality have testified, unanimously, that no one except the One True God reigns and rules over the universe.

(20) And if they remonstrate with you, tell them: 'I have submitted my whole being to Allah, and so have those who follow me.' And ask the People of the Book as well as those who follow no heavenly Scripture: 'Have you also submitted (to Allah)?'[18] If they have submitted to Him, they are indeed on the right way but if they deviate from submitting to Allah, then your duty is merely to deliver the message. Allah observes the affairs of His servants.

فَإِنْ حَآجُّوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ
اتَّبَعَنِ ۗ وَقُل لِّلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَٰبَ
وَالْأُمِّيِّـۧنَ ءَأَسْلَمْتُمْ ۚ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا
فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوا ۖ وَّإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا
عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَٰغُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌۢ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٢٠﴾

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16. In the sight of God there is only one system of life and way of conduct which is both in accord with reality and morally right. This consists of man's acknowledging God as his Lord and the sole object of his worship and devotion; of surrendering himself unreservedly to God in obedience and service. In doing so he should follow *in toto* the guidance communicated by God through His Messengers rather than try to devise ways of serving God according to his own lights. This mode of thought and action is known as Islam, and it is only reasonable that the Lord and Creator of the universe should accept nothing less from His creatures and servants. In his folly man thinks that he has the right to believe in and follow every doctrine that comes his way whether it be atheism or idolatry. In the sight of the Sovereign of the universe, however, all such attitudes amount to nothing short of rebellion against God.

17. This shows that the religion of every Messenger of God, in every age and clime, was none other than Islam (submission to God). Likewise, every Divine book, in whichever language it was revealed, and to whichever people it was addressed, contained the teachings of Islam. The various religions which have spread among mankind are distortions of this true, original religion, and are the result of tampering. Coveting privileges over and above those to which they were entitled, people altered the beliefs, principles and injunctions of the true religion in a manner conducive to their own interests.

18. The Prophet (peace be on him) is asked to tell them in effect: 'I and my followers have embraced the original, unadulterated Islam which is the

(21) Give those who refuse to follow the directives of Allah, who slay the Prophets unjustly, and who slay those who enjoin justice, give them glad tidings of a grievous chastisement.[19] (22) These are the people whose works have gone to waste in this world and in the World to Come.[20] They have none to help them.[21]

(23) Have you not noticed those who have been given a portion of the Book? Whenever their learned men are summoned to the Book of Allah to judge the differences between them,[22] a party of them turns away in aversion. ►

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَأْمُرُونَ
بِٱلْقِسْطِ مِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ فَبَشِّرْهُم
بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢١﴾ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ
حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَٰلُهُمْ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن
نَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟
نَصِيبًا مِّنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَىٰ كِتَٰبِ
ٱللَّهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّىٰ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ
وَهُم مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

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true religion enjoined by God. Tell us, now, if you are prepared to give up the accretions introduced by your forefathers, and embrace this original, true religion?'

19. This is a sarcastic remark. Its purpose is to bring home to them that the misdeeds about which they are so jubilant, and which they regard as their proud achievements, will ultimately lead them to a painful end.

20. They have spent their efforts and energies in a manner leading to catastrophic results in this world and the Next.

21. No power can make these misdeeds either bear good fruit or prevent them bearing evil fruit. The powers upon which the wrong-doers rely for support in this world and in the World to Come will not be of any help to them.

22. They are asked to acknowledge the Book of God as the final arbiter in all matters, and to submit to its judgement, accepting as right whatever this Book holds to be right, and as wrong whatever it holds to be wrong.

The Book of God referred to here is the Torah and the *Injīl*, while the

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(24) This is because they say: 'The fire of Hell shall not touch us except for a limited number of days.'[23] The false beliefs which they have forged have deluded them in their faith. (25) How, then, will they fare when We shall gather them all together to witness the Day about (the coming of) which there is no doubt, and when every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has done, and none shall be wronged?

(26) Say: 'O Allah, Lord of all dominion! You give dominion to whom You will, and take away dominion from whom You will, and You exalt whom You will, and abase whom You will. In Your Hand is all good. Surely You are All-Powerful. ►

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَن تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا
أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۖ وَغَرَّهُمْ فِي دِينِهِم
مَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَكَيْفَ
إِذَا جَمَعْنَاهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ لَّا رَيْبَ فِيهِ
وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ
وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ
مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَن تَشَاءُ
وَتَنزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّن تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَن
تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَاءُ ۖ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ ۖ
إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

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expression 'those who have been given a portion of the Book' refers to the Jewish and Christian religious scholars. (For the Qur'ānic view of the Torah and the *Injīl* see n. 2 above – Ed.)

23. These people considered themselves to be God's favourites and cherished the illusion that, regardless of what they did, they were bound to enter Paradise. They took the view that since they were believers, were descended from pious people, followed noble Prophets, and were disciples and admirers of holy men, Hell would not dare touch them. They also thought that even if they were thrown into Hell they would remain there for a few days only, to be purged of the impurity of the sins which had afflicted them, and would then be sent straight to Paradise. Such notions had made them so bold that even when they committed the most atrocious crimes and the most mortal of sins, and brazenly deviated from Truth and rectitude, their hearts remained utterly unmoved by the fear of God.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(27) You cause the night to pass into the day and the day to pass into the night. You bring forth the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living, and You give sustenance to whom You will beyond all reckoning.'[24]

(28) The believers may not take the unbelievers for their allies in preference to those who believe. Whoever does this has nothing to do with Allah unless he does so in order to protect himself from their wrong-doing.[25] Allah warns you to beware of Him for it is to Allah that you will return.[26] (29) Say: 'Whether you conceal what is in your hearts or disclose it, Allah knows it. Allah knows what is in the heavens and in the earth and He has power over everything.'

تُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِي ٱلنَّهَارِ وَتُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِي
ٱلَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ ٱلْحَيَّ مِنَ ٱلْمَيِّتِ
وَتُخْرِجُ ٱلْمَيِّتَ مِنَ ٱلْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَن
تَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢٧﴾ لَّا يَتَّخِذِ
ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ أَوْلِيَآءَ مِن دُونِ
ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۖ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَيْسَ
مِنَ ٱللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّآ أَن تَتَّقُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ
تُقَىٰةً ۗ وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسَهُۥ ۗ وَإِلَى
ٱللَّهِ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨﴾ قُلْ إِن تُخْفُوا۟ مَا فِي
صُدُورِكُمْ أَوْ تُبْدُوهُ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ۗ
وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

24. Those who disbelieved and disobeyed were seen to be prosperous, whereas the believers, with their devotion and loyalty to God, suffered all the deprivation, persecution and torment to which the Prophet and his followers were subjected around the year 3 A.H. The contrasting states of the two groups of men were the reverse of what would naturally be expected. This raised disturbing questions in people's minds about the underlying wisdom of this phenomenon. The verse conveys God's answer.

25. This means that it is lawful for a believer, helpless in the grip of the enemies of Islam and in imminent danger of severe wrong and persecution, to keep his faith concealed and to behave in such a manner as to create the impression that he is on the same side as his enemies. A person whose Muslim identity is discovered is permitted to adopt a friendly attitude towards the unbelievers in order to save his life. If he considers himself incapable of enduring the excesses to which he may be subjected, he may even state that he is not a believer.

(30) The Day is approaching when every soul shall find itself confronted with whatever good it has done and whatever evil it has wrought. It will then wish there is a wide space between it and the Day! Allah warns you to beware of Him; He is most tender towards His servants.[27]

(31) (O Messenger!) Tell people: 'If you indeed love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and will forgive you your sins. Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.' (32) Say: 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger.' If they turn away from this then know that Allah does not love those who refuse to obey Him and His Messenger.[28]

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ
مُّحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِن سُوٓءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ
بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُۥٓ أَمَدًۢا بَعِيدًا
وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسَهُۥ وَٱللَّهُ
رَءُوفٌۢ بِٱلْعِبَادِ ﴿٣٠﴾ قُلْ إِن كُنتُمْ
تُحِبُّونَ ٱللَّهَ فَٱتَّبِعُونِى يُحْبِبْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ
﴿٣١﴾ قُلْ أَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ فَإِن
تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

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26. One should not be overwhelmed by the fear of other human beings to the extent of losing the fear of God. Human beings can harm a man but the most they can do is to ruin his transient, earthly life. God, on the other hand, can subject him to everlasting torment. If one is constrained in extraordinary circumstances to resort to a prudent concealment of faith (*taqīyah*) in order to save one's life, this concealment should remain within reasonable limits. The most one is permitted to do is to protect one's life and property without jeopardizing either the interests of Islam or of the Muslim community as a whole, and without causing loss of life and property to other Muslims. One must never allow saving one's own life to lead to the propagation of unbelief at the expense of Islam and to the dominance of unbelievers over Muslims. Here the believers are warned that, no matter how dangerous the circumstances surrounding them, they cannot escape God's reproach if they give substantial aid to those rebelling against Him, and cause any harm to God's chosen religion, to the community of believers or to any individual believer. For, it is to God that one will ultimately return for reckoning.

(33) Truly Allah[29] chose Adam and Noah and the descendants of Abraham and of 'Imrān[30] above all mankind (34) (for His messengership) – a people alike and the seed of one another.[31] Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing (35). (He also heard) when the woman of 'Imrān[32] said: 'O Lord! Behold, unto You do I vow that the child in my womb is to be devoted to Your exclusive service. Accept it, then, from me. Surely You alone are All-Hearing, All-Knowing.'[33]

۞ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰٓ ءَادَمَ وَنُوحًا وَءَالَ
إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَءَالَ عِمْرَٰنَ عَلَى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ
﴿٣٣﴾ ذُرِّيَّةًۢ بَعْضُهَا مِنۢ بَعْضٍ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾ إِذْ قَالَتِ ٱمْرَأَتُ عِمْرَٰنَ رَبِّ
إِنِّى نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِى بَطْنِى مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ
مِنِّىٓ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٥﴾

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27. It is out of sheer goodwill that God warns people against deeds likely to have devastating consequences for them.

28. This marks the conclusion of the first discourse. Reflection upon its contents, particularly the reference to the Battle of Badr, leads one to the conclusion that this section was probably revealed between the battles of Badr and Uḥud, i.e. sometime in 3 A.H. The tradition mentioned by Muḥammad b. Isḥāq has led to the common misunderstanding that the first eighty verses of this *sūrah* were revealed on the occasion of the arrival of the deputation from Najrān in 9 A.H. (See Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, pp. 573 ff., especially p. 576; Ibn Isḥāq, *Life of Muḥammad*, tr. A. Guillaume, second impression, London, Oxford, 1968, pp. 270 ff., especially p. 272 – Ed.) This is not true. In the first place, the introductory section indicates that the *sūrah* was revealed much earlier. Second, the Tradition narrated by Muqātil b. Sulaymān states explicitly that on the occasion of the arrival of the deputation from Najrān only those verses which concern the Prophets John (Yaḥyá) and Jesus ('Īsá) (peace be on them) were revealed, and the number of those verses is about thirty.

29. This marks the beginning of the second discourse. The period of its revelation is about 9 A.H., when a delegation from the Christian republic of Najrān visited the Prophet. Najrān lies between the Ḥijāz and Yaman, and comprised, at that time, seventy-three towns and villages. Its population can be gauged from the fact that an estimated one hundred and twenty

thousand men could bear arms. The entire population was Christian and was under the hegemony of three Christian chiefs. The first of these, *'āqib*, was the head of the community. The second, *sayyid*, looked after the collective and political affairs of the people. The third, *usquf* (bishop), was their religious leader. (See Ibn Hishām, vol. 1, p. 573; Ibn Isḥāq, *Life of Muḥammad*, tr. A. Guillaume, pp. 270 f. – Ed.)

When the Prophet annexed Makka, the whole of Arabia became convinced that the future of the area was bound up with him, and deputations from all parts of the peninsula began to visit him. In this connection the three chiefs of Najrān came to Madina accompanied by sixty people. As they were not prepared to go to war, the alternatives before them were either to embrace Islam or to live as *dhimmīs* (protected non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic state). It was on this occasion that God revealed this discourse; it served as an invitation to the people of Najrān to accept Islam.

30. 'Imrān was the father of Moses and Aaron, and has been mentioned in the Bible as Amram.

31. The real error of the Christians lies in considering Jesus to be the son of God and a partner in His godhead, rather than His servant and Messenger. If this misunderstanding was removed it would become quite easy for them to advance towards Islam. Hence at the very outset of the discourse it is mentioned that Adam, Noah and the Prophets in the house of Abraham and 'Imrān were all human beings. Even though many Prophets were born in the same family, one from the other, none of them was God. Their merit lay in the fact that God had chosen them to preach His religion and reform the world.

32. If the 'woman of 'Imrān' is interpreted as the wife of 'Imrān, this 'Imrān must be different from the 'Imrān just mentioned (see the preceding verse). In the Christian tradition the name of the father of Mary is mentioned as Joachim. If this expression, however, is interpreted to mean 'a woman of the house of 'Imrān', it would mean that the mother of Mary belonged to that tribe. There is, unfortunately, no definite source of information that would lead us to prefer one interpretation to the other, as there is no historical record either about who the parents of Mary were, or to which tribes they belonged. Were we to accept the tradition that the mother of John (Yaḥyā) and the mother of Jesus were cousins, then it would be valid to interpret the expression as meaning 'a woman of the tribe of 'Imrān' for, according to the Gospel of Luke, the mother of John was one of the daughters of Aaron (Luke 1: 5).

33. That is, God heeds the prayers of His creatures and is well aware of their intentions.

(36) But when she gave birth to a female child, she said: 'O Lord! I have given birth to a female' – and Allah knew full well what she had given birth to – 'and a female is not the same as a male.[34] I have named her Mary and commit her and her offspring to You for protection from Satan, the accursed.' (37) Thereupon her Lord graciously accepted Mary and vouchsafed to her a goodly growth and placed her in the care of Zechariah.

Whenever Zechariah[35] visited her in the sanctuary,[36] he found her provided with food. He asked her: 'O Mary, how did this come to you?' She said: 'It is from Allah. Allah provides sustenance to whom He wills beyond all reckoning.'

فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا
أُنثَىٰ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعَتْ وَلَيْسَ
الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَىٰ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي
أُعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذُرِّيَّتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ
الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٣٦﴾ فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ
حَسَنٍ وَأَنبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا
زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا
الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِندَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ
أَنَّىٰ لَكِ هَٰذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

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34. Since a boy is free from some of the physical shortcomings and social disabilities associated with a girl, the mother of Mary thought that had the child been a boy he would have been more able to achieve the purpose for which she had consecrated the child.

35. This section refers to that period of Mary's life when she attained her majority and was admitted to the Temple of Jerusalem, and devoted all her time to remembering God. Zechariah, into whose care she was given, was perhaps the husband of her maternal aunt, and was one of the guardians of the Temple. This Zechariah is not to be confused with the Prophet Zechariah whose assassination is mentioned in the Old Testament.

36. The word *miḥrāb* usually refers to that niche in mosques where the leader of the prayer stands. In this instance, however, the term signifies the apartments usually built in synagogues and sanctuaries on a raised platform adjacent to the place of congregational worship, which served as

(38) Then Zechariah prayed to his Lord: 'O Lord! Grant me from Yourself out of Your grace the gift of a goodly offspring, for indeed You alone heed all Prayers.'[37] (39) As he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out to him: 'Allah gives you good tidings of John (Yaḥyá),[38] who shall confirm a command of Allah,[39] shall be outstanding among men, utterly chaste, and a Prophet from among the righteous.' (40) Zechariah exclaimed: 'My Lord! How shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me and my wife is barren?' He said: 'Thus shall it be;[40] Allah does what He wills.' ►

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُۥ ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ
هَبْ لِى مِن لَّدُنكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ إِنَّكَ
سَمِيعُ ٱلدُّعَآءِ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَنَادَتْهُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ
وَهُوَ قَآئِمٌ يُصَلِّى فِى ٱلْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيَحْيَىٰ مُصَدِّقًۢا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ
ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ
لِى غُلَٰمٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِىَ ٱلْكِبَرُ وَٱمْرَأَتِى
عَاقِرٌ ۖ قَالَ كَذَٰلِكَ ٱللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ
مَا يَشَآءُ ﴿٤٠﴾

the residence of caretakers, servants and beggars. Mary lived in an apartment of this kind and devoted all her time to worship and prayer.

37. Until then Zechariah had no issue. The sight of this pious young girl made him yearn for a child just as virtuous and devout. When he saw that God sent food to her, by dint of His limitless power, he felt hopeful that God might also bless him with issue, despite his old age.

38. In the Bible his name is mentioned as John the Baptist. For information about him see Matthew 3, 9 and 14; Mark 1 and 6; Luke 1 and 3.

39. The 'command from Allah' signifies Jesus (peace be on him). His birth took place as the result of an extraordinary command from God and in an unusual manner, hence he is designated as 'the command' or 'word' from Allah.

40. God granted Zechariah a son despite his old age and despite the barrenness of his wife.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(41) Zechariah said: 'O my Lord! Appoint a sign for me.'[41] The angel said: 'The sign for you shall be that you shall not speak to men for three days except by gesture. Remember your Lord and extol His glory by night and by day.'[42]

(42) Then came the time when the angels said: 'O Mary! Behold, Allah has chosen you, and made you pure, and exalted you above all the women in the world. (43) O Mary! Remain devout to your Lord, and prostrate yourself in worship, and bow with those who bow (before Him).'

(44) (O Muḥammad!) We reveal to you this account from a realm which lies beyond the reach of your perception for you were not with them when they drew lots with their pens about who should be Mary's guardian,[43] and you were not with them when they disputed about it.

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱجْعَل لِّيٓ ءَايَةً قَالَ ءَايَتُكَ
أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ ٱلنَّاسَ ثَلَٰثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا
رَمْزًا وَٱذْكُر رَّبَّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ
بِٱلْعَشِيِّ وَٱلْإِبْكَٰرِ ﴿٤١﴾ وَإِذْ قَالَتِ
ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰكِ
وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَىٰكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ
ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ يَٰمَرْيَمُ ٱقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ
وَٱسْجُدِي وَٱرْكَعِي مَعَ ٱلرَّٰكِعِينَ
﴿٤٣﴾ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ
إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُلْقُونَ
أَقْلَٰمَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ
وَمَا كُنتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ
﴿٤٤﴾

41. Here the request is made for some specific sign to be given by means of which Zechariah would come to know in advance when the unusual incident of the birth of a child to a couple, where the male was old and the female both old and barren, would take place.

42. The real purpose of this discourse is to disclose to the Christians the error of their belief in Jesus as God and as the son of God. The subject is introduced by mentioning the birth of John (peace be on him), another

(45) And when the angels said: 'O Mary! Allah gives you the glad tidings of a command from Him: his name shall be Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary. He shall be highly honoured in this world and in the Next, and shall be one of those near stationed to Allah. (46) And he shall speak to men in the cradle and also later when he grows to maturity and shall indeed be among the righteous.' (47) She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has ever touched me?' The angel answered: 'Thus shall it be.[44] Allah creates whatever He wills. When He decides something, He merely says: "Be" and it is. (48) And He will teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel, (49) and he will be a Messenger to the Children of Israel.'

إِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ ٱسْمُهُ ٱلْمَسِيحُ
عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَٱلْءَاخِرَةِ وَمِنَ ٱلْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَيُكَلِّمُ
ٱلنَّاسَ فِى ٱلْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ
ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ
لِى وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِى بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَٰلِكِ
ٱللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا
يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَيُعَلِّمُهُ
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ
وَٱلْإِنجِيلَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِىٓ
إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ

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miraculous birth which had taken place only six months before the birth of the Messiah (peace be on him) and among his own relatives. God wants to make the Christians ask themselves why the miraculous birth of Jesus should make *him* God when the similarly miraculous birth of John did not make him so.

43. They drew lots to decide who should be the guardian of Mary, whose mother had consecrated her to the service of God in the Temple. Since she was a girl, it was a delicate matter as to who from among the priests of the Temple would be the appropriate person to take care of her.

44. Thus it was affirmed that a child would be born to Mary despite the fact that no man had touched her. The angel's answer mentioned here, 'Thus shall it be', was exactly the same as the response given to Zechariah. Both the following sentences and the preceding section support the view

(And when he came to them he said): 'I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will make for you from clay the likeness of a bird and then I will breathe into it and by the leave of Allah it will become a bird. I will also heal the blind and the leper, and by the leave of Allah bring the dead to life. I will also inform you of what things you eat and what you treasure up in your houses. Surely this is a sign for you if you are true believers.[45] (50) And I have come to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah,[46] and to make lawful to you some of the things which had been forbidden to you.[47] I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; so have fear of Allah and obey me. ►

أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُم بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ أَنِّي
أَخْلُقُ لَكُم مِّنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ
الطَّيْرِ فَأَنفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا
بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ
وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ
فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا
بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَاةِ وَلِأُحِلَّ
لَكُم بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَجِئْتُكُم بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا
اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٥٠﴾

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that the angel had conveyed to Mary the glad tidings that a son would be born to her without normal sexual contact, and it was thus that Jesus was born. For, if Mary's child was to be born to her in the usual manner in which children are born to women, and if the birth of Jesus did take place in the normal way, the entire narrative from verse 35 of this *sūrah* to verse 63 would have to be declared absurd.

Indeed, one would be forced to treat as meaningless all those statements about the birth of Jesus which are found scattered elsewhere in the Qur'ān. The Christians had begun to regard Jesus as God and the son of God because of this fatherless birth. The Jews, in turn, cast aspersions on Mary's chastity on the grounds that she had given birth to a child despite being unmarried. If the fatherless birth of Jesus was itself false, it would have been sufficient to tell the Christians that they were indulging in sheer mis-statement, that Mary had indeed been married, that she had a legitimate husband, and that it was as a result of that wedlock that Jesus

► *Translation continued on page 255.*

was born. If this fact could have been stated plainly, there would have been no need for long preparatory statements and complicated propositions, and no need to call Jesus the son of Mary instead of naming his father. For far from resolving the issue such statements add to the confusion. Those who believe the Qur'ān to be the word or command from God and yet try to prove that the birth of Jesus took place in the normal manner, as a result of union between his father and mother, end up by proving only that God is less capable of clear expression than they are!

45. It is hinted here that these signs are sufficient proof that Jesus was designated by God, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, provided people are prepared to accept the truth instead of obstinately clinging to their prejudiced views.

46. This is further proof that Jesus had been entrusted with a mission by God. Had he not been designated by God but by an imposter he would surely have attempted to found an independent religion, exploiting his miracles to lead people away from their original faith. However, Jesus believed in, and confirmed, the validity of the teachings of the original religion which had been preached at God's behest by the earlier Prophets.

The fact that Jesus preached the same religion as that expounded earlier by Moses and the other Prophets is also borne out by the statements of the existing Gospels. According to Matthew, in his Sermon on the Mount the Messiah categorically declared: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them' (Matthew 5: 17). And when a Jewish lawyer enquired: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?', Jesus replied: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depends the law and the prophets' (*ibid.*, 22: 37–40). He also instructed his disciples: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practise' (*ibid.*, 23: 2–3).

47. What Jesus wanted to impress upon them was that he would abolish the prohibitive innovations which had infiltrated the original Divine Law (*Sharī'ah*). These were the results of the superstitions of their ignorant commoners, the legal hair-splitting of their lawyers, the extremism of their world-renouncing pietists, and the ascendancy and predominance of non-Muslim peoples over them. In determining what is lawful and unlawful, Jesus would be guided by the injunctions of God and not by the inventions of human beings.

(51) Surely, Allah is my Lord and your Lord; so serve Him alone. This is the straight way.'[48]

48. This shows that, as with the other Prophets, the fundamental points of Jesus' mission were the following:

(1) Man should acknowledge the exclusive sovereignty of God which demands absolute service and obedience to Him, and Him alone. This principle serves as the basis for the entire structure of human morality and social behaviour.

(2) Man should obey the Prophets since they are the representatives of the true Sovereign.

(3) The Law which should regulate man's conduct by elaborating what is right and what is wrong should be none other than the Law of God. The laws devised by others should be abrogated. There is, thus, no difference between the missions of Jesus, Moses and Muḥammad (peace be on them all). Those who think that the missions of the Prophets differ from one another and who believe that their objectives vary have fallen into serious error. Whoever is sent by the Lord of the Universe to His creatures can have no other purpose than to dissuade God's subjects from disobeying Him and assuming an attitude of vanity and disregard towards Him, and to admonish them against associating anyone with God in His divinity (that is, either holding anyone to be a partner with the Lord of the Universe in His Sovereignty or recognizing others beside God as having a rightful claim on part of man's loyalty, devotion and worship), and to invite them all to be loyal to, and to serve, obey and worship God alone.

It is unfortunate that the Gospels in their present form do not offer as clear a picture of the mission of Jesus as that presented by the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, we find scattered throughout the Gospels all the three fundamentals mentioned above. The notion that man ought to submit himself totally to God is embodied in the following statement:

> 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve' (Matthew 4: 10).

In addition, Jesus believed that the object of his efforts was that God's commands relating to the moral realm should be obeyed in this world in the sphere of human conduct just as His commands about the operation of the physical universe are obeyed in the heavens:

> 'Thy kingdom come,
> Thy will be done,
> On earth as it is in heaven' (*ibid.*, 6: 10).

The fact that Jesus presented himself as a Prophet and a representative of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that in this capacity he asked people to follow him is borne out by several statements. When, for instance, he began his mission in Nazareth and when his own kith, kin and compatriots turned against him, he remarked: 'A prophet is not without honour except in his own country . . .' (Matthew 13: 57; see also Luke 4: 24 and Mark 6: 4). And when conspiracies were hatched in Jerusalem to put an end to his life, and people counselled him to go away, he replied: 'Nevertheless I must go on my way . . . for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem' (Luke 13: 33). When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time the disciples cried with a loud voice: 'Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord' (Luke 19: 38). This angered the Pharisees, who asked Jesus to rebuke his disciples. But he replied: 'I tell you, if these were silent the very stones would cry out' (*ibid.*, 19: 40). On another occasion he said: 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11: 28–30).

The fact that he invited people to obey the Laws of God rather than the laws made by man is evident from his response (found in both Matthew and Mark) to the objection raised by the Pharisees to the conduct of their disciples who ate with defiled hands, that is, without washing.

> 'Well did Isiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:
>
> This people honours me with their lips,
> but their heart is far from me;
> in vain do they worship me,
> teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'
>
> And he said to them: 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother", and "He who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him surely die", but you say, "If a man tells his father or mother what you would have gained from me is Corban (that is, given to God), and then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on"' (Mark 7: 6–13; see also Matthew 15: 2–9).

(52) And when Jesus perceived their leaning towards unbelief, he asked: 'Who will be my helpers in the way of Allah?' The disciples[49] said: 'We are the helpers of Allah. We believe in Allah,[50] and be our witness that we have submitted ourselves exclusively to Allah.* (53) Our Lord! We believe in the commandment You have revealed and we obey the Messenger; make us, then, one of those who bear witness (to the Truth).'

49. The word *ḥawārī* means approximately the same as the word *anṣār* in the Islamic tradition. In the Bible the usual terms are 'apostles' and 'disciples'. Jesus' chosen disciples were called apostles in the sense that they had been entrusted with a mission by him rather than in the sense of having been entrusted with a mission by God.

50. At various places the Qur'ān characterizes man's participation in the effort to establish the supremacy of Islam as 'helping God'. This needs a little explanation. God has endowed man with the freedom of will and choice, with the result that He does not resort to His omnipotent will to compel man either to do certain things or to refrain from others. He rather leaves man free to adopt the course that pleases him – be it that of either belief or unbelief, of either obedience or disobedience. God prefers to instruct man by means of persuasive argument and admonition, so as to bring home to him that even though he is free to disbelieve, disobey and defy the Will of God, his own interest and well-being lie in serving and obeying his Creator.

Hence, directing people to the right path by persuasion and admonition is of concern to God. He regards those who contribute to this cause as His allies and helpers. This is, in fact, the most exalted position attainable by man. When a man performs Prayers, keeps his fast and worships God in other ways, he is merely on the level of service and subjection to God. But when a man strives to spread God's true religion and to enthrone it in actual life, he is honoured with the status of God's ally and helper, which is the zenith of man's spiritual growth.

*Literally, 'and be our witness that we are *Muslims*' – Ed.

(54) Then they schemed (against the Messiah), and Allah countered their schemes by schemes of His own. Allah is the best of schemers. (55) (And it was part of His scheme) when Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will recall you[51] and raise you up to Me and will purify you (of the company) of those who disbelieve,[52] and will set your followers above the unbelievers till the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me you shall return, and I will judge between you regarding what you differed. (56) As for those who disbelieved, I shall punish them with a terrible chastisement in this world and in the Next; and they shall find none to help them. (57) But those who believe and do righteous deeds, He will reward them in full. Allah does not love the unjust.'

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ
الْمَاكِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾ إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَىٰ إِنِّي
مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ
اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ
الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ
فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ
تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
فَأُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّاصِرِينَ
﴿٥٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

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51. The expression used is *mutawaffīka*. The original meaning of *tawaffá* is to take and receive. To 'seize a person's soul' constitutes the figurative rather than the literal meaning of the word. Here the word is used in the sense of 'recall', for example, the recall of an official from his work. The Israelites had persisted in their disobedience, and despite repeated warnings and admonitions their collective behaviour had become increasingly corrupt. They had killed a succession of Prophets and were out to shed the blood of all those who invited them to righteousness and moral rectitude. In order to complete His argument against them, and to give them a last chance to reform themselves, God sent to them two great Prophets, Jesus and John the Baptist. These Prophets carried with them such overwhelming proof of their designation by God that no ground was left for anyone to disbelieve in them, except those who were obstinately

hostile to the Truth and who had become exceedingly bold in their opposition to it.

Yet the Israelites let this last opportunity slip away. They not only spurned the message of the Prophets but also brazenly indulged in many other atrocious crimes. One of their chiefs had John beheaded at the behest of a dancing girl, and their priests and scribes conspired to have Jesus put to death by the Roman authorities. Further admonition would have been a sheer waste of time. God, therefore, decided to recall His Prophet and condemned the Israelites to perpetual disgrace.

It should be noted that this whole discourse (verses 3: 33 ff.) is devoted to repudiating the Christian belief in the godhead of Jesus, and to reforming their beliefs. The main reasons for the spread of these false beliefs were: (i) the miraculous birth of Jesus; (ii) the miracles which he performed; and (iii) his ascension into heaven (which is mentioned categorically in the Christian scriptures).

The Qur'ān confirms the miraculous birth of Jesus and asserts that this fatherless birth is a manifestation of God's omnipotence. God creates whomsoever He wills and in the manner He chooses. This extraordinary birth neither proves that Jesus was God nor that he had any share in God's godhead. The miracles of Jesus are also verified by the Qur'ān; in fact it enumerates them one by one. The Qur'ān, however, makes it clear that Jesus performed these miracles in accordance with God's will, and not of his own innate power.

Had the traditions cherished by the Christians regarding Jesus' ascension into heaven been without foundation, they would have been told that he whom they regarded as either God or the son of God had died long ago and become part of the earth, and that if they wanted to satisfy themselves on that score they could go and witness for themselves his grave at a certain place. But not only does the Qur'ān not make any categorical statement that Jesus died, it employs an expression which, to say the least, contains the possibility of being interpreted as meaning that he had been raised into heaven alive. Further, the Qur'ān tells the Christians that Jesus, contrary to their belief, was not crucified. This means that the man who cried out at the end of his life: '*Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?*', that is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27: 46), and the one whose image was seen on the cross was not Christ; God had already raised Christ into heaven.

As for those who try to interpret these Qur'ānic verses as indicating the death of Jesus, they actually prove only that God is incapable of expressing His ideas in clear, lucid terms.

52. The words 'those who disbelieve' here refer to the Jews whom Jesus had invited to believe, and who had refused that invitation. The expression: 'your followers', if it denotes the *true* followers of Jesus, can only mean Muslims. Should 'followers' signify *all* those who profess allegiance to Jesus, it would include both Christians and Muslims.

(58) What We recite to you consists of signs and wise admonition. (59) Surely, in the sight of Allah, the similitude of the creation of Jesus is as the creation of Adam whom He created out of dust, and then said: 'Be', and he was.[53] (60) This is the truth from your Lord; be not, then, among those who doubt.[54]

ذَٰلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ وَٱلذِّكْرِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿٥٨﴾ إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ ءَادَمَ خَلَقَهُۥ مِن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾ ٱلْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

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53. This means that if Jesus' miraculous birth is sufficient proof that he should be regarded either as God or as the son of God then there are even stronger grounds to apply this to Adam. For, while Jesus was born without a father, Adam was born with neither father nor mother.

54. The main points set before the Christians so far are the following: First, it was impressed upon them that none of the various arguments which gave rise to the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus provided valid grounds to support that doctrine. Jesus was merely a human being whom God had created in an extraordinary manner for reasons best known to Him. God had also invested Jesus with the power to perform certain miracles by means of which he could categorically establish his claim to prophethood. It seems perfectly reasonable that God should not have allowed such an extraordinary person to be crucified by unbelievers and should have raised him up to Himself. As the Sovereign, God has the power to treat any of His subjects as He wishes. How can this extraordinary treatment of Jesus justify the conclusion that the subject was himself either the Sovereign, the son of the Sovereign or an associate with Him in His Sovereignty?

Second, the message of Muḥammad (peace be on him) is the same as that of Jesus. The missions of the two are identical.

Third, even after [the ascension of] Jesus the religion of his disciples remained the same, namely, Islam, which is now expounded by the Qur'ān. What has happened is that, in the course of time, the Christians have abandoned the teachings of Christ, and have deviated from the religion followed by the early disciples of Jesus.

فَمَنْ حَآجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَكَ مِنَ
ٱلْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا۟ نَدْعُ أَبْنَآءَنَا
وَأَبْنَآءَكُمْ وَنِسَآءَنَا وَنِسَآءَكُمْ
وَأَنفُسَنَا وَأَنفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ
فَنَجْعَل لَّعْنَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَى
ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٦١﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ
ٱلْقَصَصُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۚ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ ۚ
وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾
فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٣﴾
قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ تَعَالَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ
سَوَآءٍۭ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ
وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِۦ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ
بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن
تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَقُولُوا۟ ٱشْهَدُوا۟ بِأَنَّا
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(61) Tell whoever disputes with you on this matter after true knowledge has come to you: 'Come! Let us summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, and then let us pray together and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie.'[55] (62) This is the true story. There is no God but Allah, and assuredly Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise. (63) And if they turn their backs, truly Allah knows those who cause mischief.

(64) Say:[56] 'People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you:[57] that we shall serve none but Allah and shall associate none with Him in His divinity and that some of us will not take others as lords beside Allah.' And if they turn their backs (from accepting this call), tell them: 'Bear witness that we are the ones who have submitted ourselves exclusively to Allah.'*

55. The real aim in suggesting this procedure for deciding the dispute was to prove that the attitude of those amongst the delegation of Najrān was one of deliberate stubbornness and intransigence. They had no sound arguments to contradict any of the points mentioned above, and they could not find any shred of evidence in their own scriptures upon which they could claim, with firm conviction, that their beliefs were true. Moreover, all that the members of the deputation had come to know of the character, teachings and achievements of the Prophet had made them more or less

*Literally: 'Bear witness that we are *Muslims*' – Ed.

(65) People of the Book! Why do you dispute with us about Abraham even though the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after the time of Abraham? Do you not understand?[58] (66) Behold, you are those who have disputed greatly concerning matters which you knew; why are you now disputing about matters that you know nothing about? Allah knows it whereas you do not know. (67) Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he was a Muslim, wholly devoted to God.[59] And he certainly was not amongst those who associate others with Allah in His divinity. ►

يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تُحَآجُّونَ فِيٓ
إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ وَمَآ أُنزِلَتِ ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةُ
وَٱلۡإِنجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعۡدِهِۦٓۚ أَفَلَا
تَعۡقِلُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ هَٰٓأَنتُمۡ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ
حَٰجَجۡتُمۡ فِيمَا لَكُم بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞ فَلِمَ
تُحَآجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيۡسَ لَكُم بِهِۦ عِلۡمٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ
يَعۡلَمُ وَأَنتُمۡ لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ مَا كَانَ
إِبۡرَٰهِيمُ يَهُودِيّٗا وَلَا نَصۡرَانِيّٗا وَلَٰكِن كَانَ
حَنِيفٗا مُّسۡلِمٗا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ
﴿٦٧﴾

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convinced of his prophethood, and at least caused their disbelief to waver. When they were told that if they had full confidence in the truth of their beliefs they should come forward and pray to God that His curse should fall on the deniers of the truth, none of them came forward. It thus became clear all over Arabia that the priests and leaders of Christianity in Najrān, whose holiness was celebrated far and wide, followed beliefs, the truth of which, they themselves were not fully confident in.

56. This marks the beginning of the third discourse of this *sūrah*. Its contents invite the conclusion that the *sūrah* was revealed sometime between the battles of Badr and Uḥud. The subjects of these three discourses are so closely interrelated that some commentators have wrongly understood the verses which follow to be part of the foregoing discourse. From the whole tenor of the discourse which now begins, however, it is evident that it is addressed to the Jews.

57. The invitation here is for the two parties to agree on something believed in by one of them, the Muslims, and the soundness of which could hardly be denied by the other party, the Christians. For this was the belief of their own Prophets and had been taught in their own scriptures.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(68) Surely the people who have the best claim to a relationship with Abraham are those who followed him in the past, and presently this Prophet and those who believe in him; Allah is the guardian of the men of faith.

(69) A party of the People of the Book would fain lead you astray, whereas in truth they lead none astray except themselves, but they do not realize it. (70) People of the Book! Why do you reject the signs of Allah even though you yourselves witness them?[60] (71) People of the Book! Why do you confound Truth with falsehood, and why do you conceal the Truth knowingly?

إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَٰهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ
اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَٰذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾ وَدَّت
طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَٰبِ لَوْ يُضِلُّونَكُمْ
وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ
وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ يَٰٓأَهْلَ
الْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ اللَّهِ
وَأَنتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ يَٰٓأَهْلَ
الْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ بِالْبَٰطِلِ
وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

58. That is, both Judaism and Christianity came into existence after the Torah and the *Injīl* had been revealed; Abraham had lived much earlier than that. Thus it can easily be grasped that the religion of Abraham could not have been that of either Judaism or Christianity. If Abraham was on the right path and had attained salvation it is obvious that one need not follow either Judaism or Christianity in order to be on the right path and to attain salvation. (See also *Sūrah* 2, nn. 135 and 141 above.)

59. The word *ḥanīf* denotes someone who turns his face away from all other directions in order to follow one particular course. We have tried to convey this sense through the expression: 'a Muslim, wholly devoted to God'.

60. Another rendering of this could be, 'and you yourselves bear witness' to Muḥammad's prophethood. However it is translated the sense remains the same. In fact, the impeccable purity of the life of the Prophet, the astounding impact of his teachings and training on the lives of his Companions, and the loftiness of the teachings of the Qur'ān all constituted such illustrious signs of God that it was very difficult for anyone conversant

(72) A party of the People of the Book said: 'Believe in the morning what has been revealed to those who believe, and then deny it in the evening that they may thus retract (from their faith).'[61] (73) They also say among themselves: 'Do not follow anyone except him who follows your faith.' Say: 'Surely true guidance is Allah's. It is His favour that anyone should be given the like of what you have been given in the past, and that others should have been given firm evidence to proffer against you before your Lord.' Say: 'Surely bounty is in the Hand of Allah; He gives it to whom He wills.

وَقَالَت طَّآئِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ ءَامِنُوا۟
بِٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَجْهَ
ٱلنَّهَارِ وَٱكْفُرُوٓا۟ ءَاخِرَهُۥ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ
﴿٧٢﴾ وَلَا تُؤْمِنُوٓا۟ إِلَّا لِمَن تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ
قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْهُدَىٰ هُدَى ٱللَّهِ أَن يُؤْتَىٰٓ
أَحَدٌ مِّثْلَ مَآ أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَآجُّوكُمْ عِندَ
رَبِّكُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ ٱللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ
مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ

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with the lives of the Prophets and the tenor of Divine Scriptures to doubt the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be on him).

It is a fact that many Jews and Christians (especially their scholars) came to recognize in their hearts that Muḥammad was the very Prophet whose coming had been announced by the preceding Prophets. This fact was so overwhelming that, despite their intransigence, they could not help but give verbal expression, at times, to the truth of the Prophet's teachings. This is why the Qur'ān repeatedly blames them for maliciously misrepresenting the signs of God which they saw with their own eyes and to which they themselves attested.

61. This was one of the devices adopted by the leaders and rabbis of the Jews who lived on the outskirts of Madina in order to damage the mission of Islam. To demoralize the Muslims and create misgivings about the Prophet (peace be on him), they sent their agents to embrace Islam publicly, then to renounce it, and subsequently to go about telling people they had done so because of the faults they had found in Islam, the Muslims and their Prophet.

Allah is All-Embracing,[62] All-Knowing.[63] (74) He singles out for His mercy whomever He wills, Allah is possessed of abounding bounty.'

(75) And among the People of the Book there are some who would restore you even if you were to entrust a treasure of gold, and of them there are some whom were you to entrust with one gold piece, will not restore it unless you stand over them. That is because they say: 'We will not be taken to task for whatever we may do to non-Jews (*ummīs*).'[64] Thus they falsely fix a lie upon Allah, and do so wittingly. (76) But Allah loves only those who fulfil their covenant and fear Allah. Truly Allah loves the God-fearing. (77) There shall be no share in the Life to Come for those who sell away the covenant of Allah and their oaths for a trivial gain. On the Day of Resurrection Allah will neither address them, look at them, nor will He purify them.[65] A painful chastisement lies ahead of them.

وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾ يَخْتَصُّ
بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ
الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾ ۞ وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ
مَنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ
وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ إِن تَأْمَنْهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَّا يُؤَدِّهِ
إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا ذَٰلِكَ
بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ
سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ
وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾ بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ
بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ
﴿٧٦﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ
وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَا
خَلَاقَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا
يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

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62. The word *wāsi'* which is used here occurs in the Qur'ān in three contexts. The first context is the narrow-mindedness and mean outlook of certain people, in contrast to which God is not 'narrow'. The second context is the denunciation of miserliness, meanness and niggardliness, in contrast to which God is Generous and Munificent. The third context is the ascription of finite, limited concepts to God as a result of their limited

(78) And there is a party among them who twist their tongues while reciting the Book to make you think that it is part of the Book when in fact it is not.[66] They say: 'It is from Allah', when in fact it is not from Allah. They falsely fix a lie upon Allah, and do so wittingly.

وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلْوُۥنَ أَلْسِنَتَهُم
بِٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ
وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَيَقُولُونَ
هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ
وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

imagination, whereas the truth is that God is infinite (see *Sūrah* 2, n. 116 above).

63. That is, God knows who deserves to be honoured and exalted.

64. This was not merely the misconception of the ignorant mass of Jews. Their religious teaching was the same and the legal doctrines of their accepted religious authorities and jurists reflected this idea. With regard to injunctions on loans and interest the Bible makes a clear distinction between an Israelite and a non-Israelite (Deuteronomy 15: 1–3; 23: 20). It is stated in the Talmud that if the bullock of an Israelite injures the bullock of a non-Israelite the former is not liable to any penalty, but not vice versa. Similarly, it is laid down that if anyone finds an unclaimed article he should enquire amongst the people who live nearby. If they are Israelites he should announce his find; if not he may keep it without saying anything further.

Rabbi Samuel Ishmael says that if a dispute between a Jew and a Gentile is brought before a judge, he should base his verdict on Jewish law if it is favourable; if the law of the Gentiles goes in favour of the Jew he should justify his judgement by saying that the Gentile has no valid ground for complaint since judgement was given according to his own law. Even if both laws are unfavourable towards the Jew the judge should still find some pretext for deciding in his favour. Rabbi Samuel says that benefit should be derived from every mistake the non-Israelite may make. (See Paul Isaac Hershon, *Talmudic Miscellany*, London, 1880, pp. 37 and 210–21.)

65. The reason is that, despite their worst crimes, they still thought that on the Day of Judgement they alone would be honoured with God's favour, and that towards them alone He would turn His gracious attention. They also entertained the belief that if they had been stained by any trace of sin, it would be washed away by the grace of their pious elders. Such people are warned here that the treatment meted out to them in the Next Life will be altogether contrary to their expectations.

(79) It does not befit a man that Allah should grant him His Book and sound judgement and prophethood, and thereafter he should say to men: 'Become servants to me apart from Allah.' He would rather say: 'Become dedicated men of Allah,[67] in accord with the dictates of the Book you have been teaching and studying.' (80) He will never enjoin you to take the angels or Prophets for your lords. Will he enjoin upon you unbelief when you have submitted yourselves to Allah?[68]

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَن يُؤْتِيَهُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحُكْمَ وَٱلنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا۟ عِبَادًا لِّى مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ وَلَٰكِن كُونُوا۟ رَبَّٰنِيِّۦنَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَبِمَا كُنتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَا يَأْمُرَكُمْ أَن تَتَّخِذُوا۟ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ وَٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ أَرْبَابًا ۗ أَيَأْمُرُكُم بِٱلْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

66. This could mean that they either distort the meaning of the Scriptures or twist the words of the text in order to misinterpret it. Its real meaning, however, seems to be that when, during their reading of the Scriptures, they encounter any word or sentence which goes against their interests, and the beliefs and notions which they cherish, they distort the meaning of it by deliberately twisting their tongues. Instances of such tongue-twisting are not altogether wanting among those who, despite their belief in the Qur'ān, share some of these people's characteristics. For instance, some people who stress the superhuman character of the Prophet (peace be on him) misread the following verse: *innamā anā basharun mithlukum* (Qur'ān 18: 110) (I am nothing but a human being like you), replacing *innamā* by *inna mā anā* and translate it: '(O Prophet), say to them: "I am not a human being like you."'

67. The term *rabbānī* is used here to denote Jewish religious scholars and functionaries who were supposed to provide true religious guidance to establish their rites of worship, implement religious laws, and so on. The same word occurs in *Sūrah* 5: 44 and 63. In the Christian tradition the word 'divine' is used as an equivalent to the word *rabbānī*.

68. This refutation is directed at all the false concepts which were attributed to the Messengers of God by various nations, and then made an integral part of the religious scriptures. These concepts were false in that they elevated either the Prophets or the angels to the level of deities

(81) And recall when Allah took a covenant from the Prophets: 'This is the Book and the Wisdom which I have given you. But should a Prophet come to you confirming that which is already with you, you shall believe in him and shall help him.'[69] So saying, Allah asked: 'Do you agree and accept to take up the burden of the covenant?' They answered: 'We agree.' He said: 'Then bear witness; and I will be with you among the witnesses. (82) Then whosoever shall turn away from this covenant, they are the transgressors.'[70]

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ لَمَآ
ءَاتَيْتُكُم مِّن كِتَٰبٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ
ثُمَّ جَآءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُّصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا
مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِۦ وَلَتَنصُرُنَّهُۥ قَالَ
ءَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِى
قَالُوٓا۟ أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَٱشْهَدُوا۟ وَأَنَا۠
مَعَكُم مِّنَ ٱلشَّٰهِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾ فَمَن تَوَلَّىٰ
بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ
ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

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and turned them into objects of worship. These verses expound the general principle that any doctrine which teaches the worship of anyone and anything other than God, and exhalts any creature to the position of God, can never be the teaching of a Prophet. It follows that if such teachings are contained in any religious scripture, they are falsely ascribed. Any such doctrine found in scripture must be considered an innovative distortion of the true teachings of the Prophets at the hands of people who had lost their way and fallen into error.

69. This means that all the Prophets had been asked to pledge – and the pledge of a Prophet is automatically binding upon his followers – that they would support every Prophet that God sent to preach and establish His religion, for which cause they had been designated. The followers of the Prophets were thus required neither to disregard, out of narrow-mindedness and bigotry, the Prophets who were to appear in the future, nor consider themselves the exclusive representatives of the true faith, nor to oppose the Truth. On the contrary, they should muster around anyone who raised the banner of Islam.

It is useful to point out that the Prophets before Muḥammad (peace be on him) had to take this pledge, and this is why every Prophet announced to his followers the coming of other Prophets in the future and directed them to support those Prophets whenever they appeared. It seems significant that there is no mention, either in the Qur'ān or in the Ḥadīth,

(83) Do they now seek a religion other than that prescribed by Allah even though all that is in the heavens and the earth is in submission to Him[71] – willingly or unwillingly – and to Him all shall return? (84) Say: 'We believe in Allah and what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and to Isaac and Jacob and his descendants, and the teachings which Allah gave to Moses and Jesus and to other Prophets. We make no distinction between any of them;[72] and to Him do we submit.'* (85) And whoever seeks a way other than this way of submission (Islām), will find that it will not be accepted from him and in the Life to Come he will be among the losers.

أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ ٱللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُۥٓ
أَسْلَمَ مَن فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ
طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ
يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾ قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ
وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَآ أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰٓ
إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْمَٰعِيلَ وَإِسْحَٰقَ
وَيَعْقُوبَ وَٱلْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَآ أُوتِىَ
مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَٱلنَّبِيُّونَ مِن
رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ
وَنَحْنُ لَهُۥ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَمَن يَبْتَغِ
غَيْرَ ٱلْإِسْلَٰمِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ
وَهُوَ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

of the Prophet Muḥammad being asked to take such a pledge. Moreover, the Prophet neither informed his followers of the advent of any future Prophet nor did he direct them to believe in the prophethood of any such Prophet.

70. The purpose of this statement is to warn the Jews and the Christians that they were desecrating the pledge they had made to God, and, by disbelieving in and opposing the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), they were violating the terms of the pledge made by their Prophets. They had thus become 'transgressors', for they had broken the bond of obedience to God.

*Literally, 'we are *Muslims* to Him' – Ed.

(86) How can Allah guide a people who once believed, and after they received clear signs and affirmed that the Messenger was a true one, lapsed into disbelief.[73] Allah does not guide the wrong-doers. (87) The recompense for their wrong-doing is that the curse of Allah and of the angels and of all men shall be upon them. (88) Thus shall they abide. Neither shall their chastisement be lightened nor shall they be granted any respite. (89) But those who repent and mend their ways shall be excepted for indeed Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (90) Those who disbelieved and have hardened in their disbelief after once believing,[74] their (pretence to) repentance shall not be accepted. Indeed such men have altogether strayed.

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي ٱللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا۟
بَعْدَ إِيمَٰنِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوٓا۟ أَنَّ ٱلرَّسُولَ
حَقٌّ وَجَآءَهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ
لَا يَهْدِي ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ جَزَآؤُهُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ
ٱللَّهِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ
﴿٨٧﴾ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ
ٱلْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾ إِلَّا
ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا۟
فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا۟ بَعْدَ إِيمَٰنِهِمْ ثُمَّ ٱزْدَادُوا۟
كُفْرًا لَّن تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ
هُمُ ٱلضَّآلُّونَ ﴿٩٠﴾

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71. The basic principle characterizing the universe, in other words the religion of the universe and of every part of it, is Islam; insofar as the universe is in a state of total obedience and service to the Will of God. Here people are asked if they would follow a way of life different from Islam though they are part of the universe which is characterized by submission to God (*islām*).

72. They are told that it is not the habit of Muslims either to believe in some Prophets and disbelieve in others or to affirm to the truth of some and call others false. Muslims are free from narrow prejudices and chauvinistic loyalties. The true attitude of Muslims is to bear witness to the truth of every Messenger of God, irrespective of where and when he appears.

(91) Truly those who disbelieved and died as unbelievers, not even an earth full of gold will be accepted from them as ransom. For such people there is painful chastisement; and none shall come to their help.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ وَمَاتُوا۟ وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَن
يُقْبَلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِم مِّلْءُ ٱلْأَرْضِ
ذَهَبًا وَلَوِ ٱفْتَدَىٰ بِهِۦٓ ۗ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن نَّـٰصِرِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(92) You shall not attain righteousness until you spend out of what you love (in the way of Allah).[75] Allah knows whatever you spend.

۞ لَن تَنَالُوا۟ ٱلْبِرَّ حَتَّىٰ تُنفِقُوا۟ مِمَّا
تُحِبُّونَ ۚ وَمَا تُنفِقُوا۟ مِن شَىْءٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

73. This is a repetition of the statement made earlier, namely that the Jewish rabbis of Arabia in the time of the Prophet (peace be on him) knew, and sometimes even testified to verbally, that Muḥammad was a true Prophet and that his teachings were the same as those of the earlier Prophets. (See for instance Qur'ān 2: 89 – Ed.) Their subsequent attitude – namely that of rejection and opposition – was the outcome of prejudice and intransigence, born out of their centuries-old hostility to the Truth.

74. They were not content with just rejecting the call to the Truth but stood in vehement opposition and hostility to it and spared no efforts in obstructing people from following the way of God. They created doubts, spread misgivings, sowed the seeds of distrust and engaged in the worst conspiracies and machinations in order to frustrate the mission of the Prophet (peace be on him).

75. The purpose of this verse is to remove the misconception of the Jews concerning 'righteousness'. The Jews had inherited an elaborate legal code which had accumulated as a result of the casuistry and hair-splitting legalism of their jurists. Their notion of 'righteousness' consisted of outward, formal conformity to that code and they evaluated all day-to-day actions, especially the trivial ones, in terms of conformity to that code. Narrow-mindedness, greed, covetousness, meanness, concealment of the Truth and readiness to barter with it lay beneath this veneer of formal piety. They were, nevertheless, considered pious in the minds of the people; Jewish public opinion condoned their conduct because it conformed to its concept of 'righteousness'.

In order to remove this misconception they are told that the things they considered fundamental to righteous conduct are of little consequence. The real spirit of righteousness consists in the love of God – a love which

(93) All food (that is lawful in the Law revealed to Muḥammad) was lawful to the Children of Israel,[76] except what Israel[77] made unlawful to themselves before the revelation of the Torah. Tell them: 'Bring the Torah and recite any passage of it if you are truthful.'

كُلُّ ٱلطَّعَامِ كَانَ حِلًّا لِّبَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تُنَزَّلَ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةُ ۗ قُلْ فَأْتُوا۟ بِٱلتَّوْرَىٰةِ فَٱتْلُوهَآ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

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makes man value the good pleasure of God above all worldly acquisitions. If the love of anything seizes a man's mind to such an extent that he is unable to sacrifice it for the sake of the love of God, then that thing has virtually become an idol, and until he smashes it the door to righteousness will remain closed to him. If a man lacks this spirit, then his excessively formal and legalistic approach in religious matters can be considered no more than glossy paint over a piece of hollow, worm-eaten wood. It may be possible to deceive human beings by the sheer lustre of the outer paint, but not God.

76. When the Jewish rabbis found no grounds for criticizing the fundamental teachings of the Prophet (there was no difference between the teachings of the previous Prophets and that of the Arabian Prophet on matters which constitute the core of religion), they raised objections about the details of religious law. The first objection was that the Prophet (peace be on him) had declared lawful a number of things which had been reckoned as unlawful since the time of the ancient Prophets. What is said here is a refutation of that objection.

77. If 'Israel' is taken to mean the 'Children of Israel' then the interpretation of this verse must be that before the revelation of the Torah they treated a number of things as prohibited on the grounds of custom and usage alone. If, however, 'Israel' signifies Jacob (Ya'qūb) then the meaning is that he avoided the use of certain foods, which his descendants wrongly understood to be religiously prohibited, as a result of either a temperamental dislike or an ailment. This latter version is more commonly accepted. It becomes clear from the next verse that the Biblical injunction regarding the prohibition of the flesh of camels and rabbits was not part of the original Torah but an interpolation by Jewish doctors. (For a detailed discussion see *Sūrah* 6, n. 122 below.)

(94) Those who falsely fix lies upon Allah despite this are the wrong-doers. (95) Say: 'Whatever Allah has said is true. Follow, then, the way of Abraham in total devotion to Allah. He was not one of those who associate others with Allah in His divinity.'[78]

(96) Behold, the first House (of Prayer) established for mankind is the one at Bakkah: it is full of blessing and a centre of guidance for the whole world.[79] (97) In it there are clear signs and the station of Abraham;[80] whoever enters it becomes secure.[81] Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all who can make their way to it. As for those who refuse to follow His command, surely Allah does not stand in need of anything.

فَمَنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ٱلْكَذِبَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ
ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ قُلْ
صَدَقَ ٱللَّهُ ۗ فَٱتَّبِعُوا۟ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا
وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ
وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِى بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا
وَهُدًى لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾ فِيهِ ءَايَٰتٌۢ
بَيِّنَٰتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ ۖ وَمَن دَخَلَهُۥ كَانَ
ءَامِنًا ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ حِجُّ ٱلْبَيْتِ
مَنِ ٱسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا ۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ غَنِىٌّ عَنِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

78. The Jews had enmeshed themselves in legalistic minutiae and these had become their major concern. They had abandoned service to the One True God and had allowed their religious life to become corrupted by polytheism. Instead of attending to the fundamentals of religion they indulged in discussions about questions that had only arisen because of the hair-splitting legalism of their scholars during their centuries of decadence.

79. The second objection raised by the Jews was that the direction for Prayer had been changed from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah. This objection is answered in *Sūrah* 2 (see verses 142 ff. and nn. 142 and 147 above). The Bible, itself, testifies that Jerusalem was built by Solomon more than four and a half centuries after Moses (see 1 Kings 6: 1), and that it was during his time that the worshippers of the One God began to pray towards it (1 Kings 8: 29–30). It is established by traditions from numerous sources

(98) Say: 'People of the Book! Why do you reject the signs of Allah when Allah is witness to all that you do?' (99) Say: 'People of the Book! Why do you hinder one who believes from the way of Allah, seeking that he follow a crooked way,* even though you yourselves are witness to its being the right way?' Allah is not heedless of what you do.

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ
بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ مَا تَعْمَلُونَ
﴿٩٨﴾ قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ
تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنتُمْ شُهَدَآءُ ۗ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ
بِغَٰفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

which are undisputed throughout Arabia, however, that the Ka'bah was constructed by Abraham who lived some eight or nine centuries before Moses. That the Ka'bah was older than the Temple of Jerusalem was beyond dispute.

80. Here it is stressed that there are several clear signs which prove that the Makkan sanctuary enjoys God's blessing and has been chosen by Him as His sanctuary. Even though it is located in the middle of wide expanses of desert God has seen to it that its inhabitants enjoy a satisfactory living. Although the rest of Arabia was plunged into chaos and disorder for about two and a half thousand years, peace and tranquillity reigned in both the precincts and the environs of the Ka'bah. Thanks to the Ka'bah the entire Arabian peninsula enjoyed four months of peace and order every year. These were the sacred months when people went on Pilgrimage. Moreover, barely a half century before the revelation of these verses, people had seen how Abrahah, the Abyssinian invader, fell prey to God's scourge when he attacked Makka with the intention of destroying the Ka'bah. At that time, this incident was known to everybody in Arabia. Its memory was fresh and many eye-witnesses were still alive at the time of the Prophet (peace be on him).

81. Even during the pre-Islamic era – the Age of Ignorance in Arabia – this sanctuary enjoyed such veneration that even those who thirsted for each other's blood saw their enemies in the sacred territory but dare not attack them.

*Were the verse to be translated according to the general understanding of the Qur'ānic exegetes, it would read as the following: 'Say: People of the Book! Why do you hinder the believers from the way of Allah, seeking to make it appear crooked, even though you yourselves are witness to its being the right way? Allah is not heedless of what you do.' – Ed.

(100) Believers! Were you to obey a party of those who were given the Book, they might cause you to renounce the Truth after you have attained to faith. (101) How can you disbelieve when you are the ones to whom the signs of Allah are recited and amidst you is His Messenger? Whoever holds fast to Allah will certainly be guided to the straight way.

(102) Believers! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and see that you do not die save in the state of submission to Allah.[82]* (103) Hold fast together to the cable of Allah[83] and be not divided. Remember the blessing that Allah bestowed upon you: you were once enemies then He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brothers. You stood on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it.[84] Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided to the right way.[85]

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن تُطِيعُواْ فَرِيقًا
مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يَرُدُّوكُم بَعْدَ
إِيمَٰنِكُمْ كَٰفِرِينَ ١٠٠ وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ
وَأَنتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ
وَفِيكُمْ رَسُولُهُۥ وَمَن يَعْتَصِم بِٱللَّهِ
فَقَدْ هُدِىَ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ١٠١
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ حَقَّ
تُقَاتِهِۦ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ
١٠٢ وَٱعْتَصِمُواْ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا
وَلَا تَفَرَّقُواْ وَٱذْكُرُواْ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ
عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ
فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ إِخْوَٰنًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ
شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا
كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَهْتَدُونَ ١٠٣

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82. They should remain steadfast in their obedience and loyalty to God.

83. The expression 'cable of Allah', in this verse, refers to the 'religion of God'. The reason for use of the word 'cable' (*habl*) is that it both

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*Literally: 'and see that you die not save that you are *Muslims*' – Ed.

(104) And from among you there must be a party who invite people to all that is good and enjoin the doing of all that is right and forbid the doing of all that is wrong. It is they who will attain true success. (105) Do not be like those who fell into factions and differed among themselves[86] after clear signs had come to them. A mighty chastisement awaits them

وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى ٱلْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ ۚ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا۟ وَٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ ٱلْبَيِّنَٰتُ ۚ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

establishes a bond between man and God and joins all believers together. To take a firm hold on this cable means that the believers should attach profound importance to their religion: this should always be the centre of their concerns; they should continually strive to establish it; and the common desire to serve it should make them co-operate with each other.

As soon as Muslims turn their attentions away from the fundamental teachings of their religion and lose sight of establishing its hegemony in life they begin to concern themselves with matters of secondary importance. And, just as they rent the communities of the former Prophets, enticing people away from their true objective in life, so schisms and dissensions are bound to plague their lives. If Muslims do this they are bound to suffer indignity and disgrace both in this world and the Next as happened with the followers of the previous Prophets.

84. This refers to the state of the Arabs on the eve of the advent of Islam. There were animosities among the tribes which regularly broke out into fighting; every now and then there was much bloodshed. Things had reached a point that the entire Arabian nation seemed to be on the verge of destroying itself. It was due to the blessings of Islam alone that it was saved from being consumed by the fire to which this verse alludes. The people of Madina had embraced Islam some three or four years before these verses were revealed. They had witnessed the blessing of Islam as it unified into one brotherhood the Aws and Khazraj, two tribes which had long been sworn enemies. Moreover, both tribes treated the migrants from Makka in a spirit of sacrifice and love seldom seen even among members of the same family.

85. If they had eyes to see they could conclude for themselves whether their salvation lay in adhering firmly to this religion or in abandoning it

(106) on the Day when some faces will turn bright and other faces will turn dark. Those whose faces have turned dark will be told: 'Did you fall into unbelief after you had been blessed with belief? Taste, then, chastisement for your unbelief.' (107) And those whose faces have turned bright, they will be in the mercy of Allah, and therein they shall abide. (108) These are the messages of Allah which We recite to you in truth, and Allah desires no wrong[87] to the people of the world. (109) To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, and to Allah are all matters referred for decision.

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ ۚ فَأَمَّا
الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُم
بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا
كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ابْيَضَّتْ
وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا
خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا
عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا
لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ
﴿١٠٩﴾

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and reverting to their former state; i.e. decide whether their true well-wishers were God and His Messenger or those Jews, polytheists and hypocrites who strove to plunge them back into their former state.

86. The reference is to those communities which received clear and straightforward teachings of the true religion but who had abandoned the fundamentals, forming separate sects around trivial and subsidiary questions; they became so engrossed in quarrelling over superfluous and insignificant questions that they lost sight of the mission God had entrusted to them, and even lost interest in those fundamentals of belief and righteous conduct which are essential for man's salvation and felicity.

87. Since God does not want to subject people to any wrong He illuminates the straight path of their salvation, and forewarns them of the matters for which they will be asked to render an account in the Hereafter. It is clear that if people abandon the path of rectitude they wrong no one but themselves.

(110) You are now the best people brought forth for (the guidance and reform of) mankind.[88] You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book[89] believed it were better for them. Some of them are believers but most of them are transgressors. (111) They will not be able to harm you except for a little hurt, and if they fight against you they will turn their backs (in flight), and then they will not be succoured. (112) Wherever they were, they were covered with ignominy, except when they were protected by either a covenant with Allah or a covenant with men.[90] They are laden with the burden of Allah's wrath, and humiliation is stuck upon them – and all this because they rejected the signs of Allah and slayed the Prophets without right, and because they disobeyed and transgressed.

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ
تَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ ۗ وَلَوْ
ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَكَانَ
خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۚ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ
وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾ لَن
يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّآ أَذًى ۖ وَإِن
يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ يُوَلُّوكُمُ ٱلْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ
لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١١﴾ ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلذِّلَّةُ
أَيْنَ مَا ثُقِفُوٓا۟ إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَحَبْلٍ
مِّنَ ٱلنَّاسِ وَبَآءُو بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْمَسْكَنَةُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ
بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا۟ يَكْفُرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ ٱلْأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا
عَصَوا۟ وَّكَانُوا۟ يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

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88. This is the same declaration that was made earlier (see verse 2: 143 above). The Arabian Prophet (peace be on him) and his followers are informed that they are being assigned the guidance and leadership of the world, a position the Israelites had been relieved of because they had shown themselves unsuitable. The Muslims were charged with this responsibility because of their competence. They were the best people in terms of character and morals and had developed in theory and in practice the qualities essential for truly righteous leadership, namely the spirit and practical commitment to promoting good and suppressing evil and the acknowledgement of the One True God as their Lord and Master. In view

(113) Yet all are not alike: among the People of the Book there are upright people who recite the messages of Allah in the watches of the night and prostrate themselves in worship. (114) They believe in Allah and in the Last Day and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and hasten to excel each other in doing good. These are among the righteous. (115) Whatever good they do shall not go unappreciated, and Allah fully knows those who are pious. (116) As for those who denied the Truth, neither their possessions nor their children will avail them against Allah. They are the people of the Fire, and therein they shall abide.

۞ لَيْسُوا سَوَآءً ۗ مِّنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ
أُمَّةٌ قَآئِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ءَانَآءَ
ٱلَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ
وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ
ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَيُسَٰرِعُونَ فِى ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ
وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾
وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَن يُكْفَرُوهُ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾ إِنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَن تُغْنِىَ عَنْهُمْ
أَمْوَٰلُهُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَٰدُهُم مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۖ
وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ أَصْحَٰبُ ٱلنَّارِ ۚ هُمْ فِيهَا
خَٰلِدُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾

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of the task entrusted to them, they had to become conscious of their responsibilities and avoid the mistakes committed by their predecessors (see *Sūrah* 2, nn. 123 and 144 above).

89. 'People of the Book' refers here to the Children of Israel.

90. If the Jews have ever enjoyed any measure of peace and security anywhere in the world they owe it to the goodwill and benevolence of others rather than to their own power and strength. At times Muslim governments granted them refuge while at others non-Muslim powers extended protection. Similarly, if the Jews ever emerged as a power it was due not to their intrinsic strength but to the strength of others.

(117) The example of what they spend in the life of this world is like that of a wind accompanied with frost which smites the harvest of a people who wronged themselves, and lays it to waste.[91] It is not Allah who wronged them; rather it is they who wrong themselves.

(118) Believers! Do not take for intimate friends those who are not of your kind. They spare no effort to injure you.[92] Indeed they love all that distresses you.

مَثَلُ مَا يُنفِقُونَ فِي هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَوٰةِ
الدُّنْيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٍ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتْ
حَرْثَ قَوْمٍ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ
فَأَهْلَكَتْهُ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنْ
أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾ يَٰأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بِطَانَةً مِّن
دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُّوا
مَا عَنِتُّمْ

91. The term 'harvest' in this parable refers to this life which resembles a field of cultivation the harvest of which one will reap in the World to Come. The 'wind' refers to the superficial appearance of righteousness, for the sake of which unbelievers spend their wealth on philanthropic and charitable causes. The expression 'frost' indicates their lack of true faith and their failure to follow the Divine Laws, as a result of which their entire life has gone astray.

By means of this parable God seeks to bring home to them that while wind is useful for the growth of cultivation if that wind turns into frost it destroys it. So it is with man's acts of charity: they can prove helpful to the growth of the harvest one will reap in the Hereafter but are liable to be destructive if mixed with unbelief. God is the Lord and Master of man as well as of all that man owns, and the world in which he lives. If a man either does not recognize the sovereignty of his Lord and unlawfully serves others or disobeys God's Laws then his actions become crimes for which he deserves to be tried; his acts of 'charity' are but the acts of a servant who unlawfully helps himself to his master's treasure and then spends it as he likes.

92. The Jews living on the outskirts of Madina had long enjoyed friendly relations with the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj. In the first place this was the result of relations between individuals. Later, they were bound by ties of neighbourliness and allegiance as a result of tribal inter-relationship. Even after the people of Aws and Khazraj embraced Islam, they maintained their old ties with the Jews and continued to treat them with the same warmth and cordiality. However, the hostility of the Jews towards the Arabian Prophet (peace be on him) and towards his mission was far too intense to allow them to maintain a cordial relationship with anyone who

Their hatred is clearly manifest in what they say, and what their breasts conceal is even greater. Now We have made Our messages clear to you, if only you can understand (the danger of their intimacy). (119) Lo! It is you who love them but they do not love you even though you believe in the whole of the (heavenly) Book.[93] When they meet you they say: 'We believe', but when they are by themselves they bite their fingers in rage at you. Say: 'Perish in your rage.' Allah knows even what lies hidden in their breasts. (120) If anything good happens to you they are grieved; if any misfortune befalls you they rejoice at it. But if you remain steadfast and mindful of Allah their designs will not cause you harm. Allah surely encompasses all that they do.

قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ
وَمَا تُخْفِي صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا
لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾
هَا أَنتُمْ أُولَاءِ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ
وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ وَإِذَا لَقُوكُمْ
قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ
الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾ إِن
تَمْسَسْكُمْ حَسَنَةٌ تَسُؤْهُمْ وَإِن
تُصِبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا وَإِن
تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ
كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا
يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

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had joined the new movement. Outwardly, the Jews maintained the same terms of friendship with the *Anṣār* (Helpers) as before but at heart they had become their sworn enemies. They made the best use of this pretended friendship, and remained constantly on the look-out for opportunities to create schisms and dissensions in the Muslim body-politic, and to draw out the secrets of the Muslims and pass them on to their enemies. Here God warns the Muslims to note this hypocrisy and take the necessary precaution.

93. It is strange that although the Muslims had reason to feel aggrieved by the Jews it was the latter who felt aggrieved by the Muslims. Since the Muslims believed in the Torah along with the Qur'ān the Jews had no justifiable ground for complaint. If anyone had cause to complain it was the Muslims for the Jews did not believe in the Qur'ān.

(121) (O Messenger![94] Remind the Muslims of the occasion) when you went forth from your home at early dawn (to the battlefield of Uḥud) and placed the believers in battle arrays. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقَاعِدَ لِلْقِتَالِ وَاللَّهُ
سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢١﴾

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94. This marks the beginning of the fourth discourse of this *sūrah*. It was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud and contains comments on it. The previous section ended with the assurance: 'But if you remain steadfast and mindful of Allah their designs will not cause you harm.' (See verse 120 above.) The Muslims did suffer a setback in the Battle of Uḥud precisely because of this lack of patience, and because of a few mistakes committed by some of them which were indicative of insufficient piety. This discourse, therefore, is quite appropriate and warns the Muslims against such weaknesses.

The discourse contains a precise and instructive commentary on all the main events connected with the Battle of Uḥud. In order to appreciate this it is appropriate to refresh our minds as to the situational context of its revelations. In the beginning of Shawwāl 3 A.H., the Quraysh attacked Madina with an army of three thousand men. In addition to their numerical superiority they were also much better equipped. Moreover, they sought to avenge their losses in the Battle of Badr. The Prophet (peace be on him) and his closest Companions were of the opinion that they should defend themselves from within the boundaries of Madina. There were, however, several young people who longed for martyrdom and felt aggrieved at not having had the opportunity to fight in the Battle of Badr. They insisted that the enemy should be resisted outside the confines of Madina. The Prophet gave in to their demands and decided to march out of the city to meet their enemies. A thousand people accompanied him. Of these, 'Abd Allāh b. Ubayy broke away along with his three hundred followers after reaching the place called Shawṭ. This, happening as it did just before the commencement of the battle, created such perplexity and confusion that the people of Banū Salamah and Banū Ḥārithah wanted to turn back, and it took some effort on the part of the Companions to persuade them not to.

The Prophet advanced with the remaining seven hundred Muslims and lined up his troops at the foot of Mount Uḥud (a distance of approximately four miles from Madina) in such a manner that the mountain was behind and the Quraysh army in front of them. There was only one mountain pass

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from where the Muslims could be subjected to a surprise attack. The Prophet posted fifty archers there as guards under the command of 'Abd Allāh b. Jubayr, instructing him neither to let anyone approach nor to move away from that spot. 'Even if you see birds fly off with our flesh', the Prophet said, 'still you must not move away from this place'. (For such instructions from the Prophet see Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, pp. 39–40 and 47, and Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, pp. 224 and 229 – Ed.) Then the battle commenced. In the beginning the Muslims proved the better side but instead of maintaining their onslaught until they had assured complete victory, they were overcome by the temptation of booty and turned to collecting the spoils. When the archers whom the Prophet had posted to repel the attack of the enemy from the rear saw that the enemy had taken to its heels and that people were collecting booty, they too joined the melee and began to do the same.

'Abd Allāh b. Jubayr tried to persuade them not to leave their posts by reminding them of the Prophet's directive. Hardly anyone heeded him. Khālid b. Walīd, who was at that time an unbeliever and who commanded the Quraysh cavalry, seized his opportunity. He rode with his men around Mount Uḥud and attacked the flank of the Muslim army through the pass. 'Abd Allāh b. Jubayr's depleted forces tried unsuccessfully to resist the attack.

The fleeing soldiers of the enemy also returned and joined the attack from the front and the scales of the battle turned against the Muslims. The suddenness of these attacks, from both the rear and the front, caused such confusion that many fled. Then the rumour spread that the Prophet, himself, had been martyred. This news shattered whatever presence of mind the Companions had left, and led many who had stood firm to lose courage altogether. At this moment there remained around the injured and bleeding Prophet (peace be on him) no more than ten or twelve loyal persons who had staked their lives for his sake. Defeat seemed inevitable. Fortunately, however, the Companions realized that the Prophet was still alive. They therefore advanced towards him from all sides, rallied around him, and led him to the safety of the mountain. (For an account of the Battle of Uḥud in early Islamic sources, see Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, pp. 61 ff., Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, pp. 199 ff., especially pp. 224, 229 f. and 237 ff., and Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, pp. 36–48, etc. – Ed.)

It remains a mystery why the unbelievers of Makka held back when victory was within their grasp. The Muslim ranks were in such disarray that they would have been hard pushed to resist further. (Cf. the account and conclusion of W. M. Watt regarding the Battle of Uḥud in *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford University Press, 1956, pp. 21 ff., especially pp. 26–9 – Ed.)

(122) And recall when two groups from among you were inclined to flag[95] although Allah was their protector; it is in Allah that the believers should put their trust. (123) For sure Allah helped you at Badr when you were utterly weak. Beware, then, of Allah; perhaps you will be thankful.

(124) And recall when you said to the believers: 'Will it not suffice you that your Lord will aid you by sending down three thousand angels?'[96] (125) If you are steadfast and mindful of God, even though the enemy should suddenly fall upon you, your Lord will help you even with five thousand marked angels. (126) Allah has reminded you of this only as a glad tiding to you and so as to let your hearts be at rest. Help can only come from Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (127) And Allah provided this aid to you in order to cut off a part of those who disbelieved and frustrate them so that they retreat in utter disappointment.

إِذْ هَمَّت طَّآئِفَتَانِ مِنكُمْ أَن
تَفْشَلَا وَٱللَّهُ وَلِيُّهُمَا ۗ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ
ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾ وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ ۖ فَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾ إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
أَلَن يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَن يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِثَلَٰثَةِ
ءَالَٰفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ مُنزَلِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ بَلَىٰٓ ۚ
إِن تَصْبِرُوا۟ وَتَتَّقُوا۟ وَيَأْتُوكُم مِّن
فَوْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا يُمْدِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِخَمْسَةِ
ءَالَٰفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾
وَمَا جَعَلَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ لَكُمْ
وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبُكُم بِهِۦ ۗ وَمَا ٱلنَّصْرُ إِلَّا
مِنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿١٢٦﴾
لِيَقْطَعَ طَرَفًا مِّنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟
أَوْ يَكْبِتَهُمْ فَيَنقَلِبُوا۟ خَآئِبِينَ ﴿١٢٧﴾

95. This refers to Banū Salamah and Banū Ḥārithah, whose morale had been undermined as a result of the withdrawal of 'Abd Allāh b. Ubayy and his followers.

96. When the Muslims saw that their enemies numbered three thousand while three hundred out of their army of one thousand had departed they

(128) (O Messenger!) It is not for you to decide whether He will accept their repentance or chastise them, for they surely are wrongdoers. (129) Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. He forgives whom He wills, and chastises whom He wills: Allah is indeed All-Forgiving, Most-Compassionate.[97]

(130) Believers! Do not swallow interest, doubled and redoubled, and be mindful of Allah so that you may attain true success.[98] (131) And have fear of the Fire which awaits those who deny the Truth. (132) And obey Allah and the Messenger, that you may be shown mercy.

لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ شَىْءٌ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَوْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ ظَٰلِمُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ وَٱللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٩﴾ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تَأْكُلُوا۟ ٱلرِّبَوٰٓا۟ أَضْعَٰفًا مُّضَٰعَفَةً وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٣٠﴾ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱلنَّارَ ٱلَّتِىٓ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾ وَأَطِيعُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

began to lose heart. It was on this occasion that the Prophet spoke these words to them.

97. When the Prophet was injured he uttered words of imprecation against the unbelievers: 'How can a people that injures its own Prophet attain salvation?' These verses are in response to that utterance.

98. The major cause of the setback suffered at Uḥud was that precisely at the moment of their victory the Muslims succumbed to the desire for worldly possessions, and turned to collecting booty rather than completing their task of crushing the enemy. Hence God thought fit to raise a barrier against this excessive adoration of money, and to urge them to give up usury which keeps man constantly absorbed in considering ways and means of amassing wealth and generally whets his appetite for money.

(133) And hasten to the forgiveness of your Lord and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing (134) who spend in the way of Allah both in plenty and hardship, who restrain their anger, and forgive others. Allah loves such good-doers.[99] (135) These are the ones who, when they commit any indecency and wrong against themselves, instantly remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins – for who will forgive sins save Allah? – and who do not wilfully persist in the wrong they did. (136) They shall be recompensed by forgiveness from their Lord and by gardens beneath which rivers flow; there they shall abide. How good is the reward of those who labour! (137) Many eras have passed before you. Go about, then, in the land and behold the end of those who gave the lie to (the directives and ordinances of Allah).

۞ وَسَارِعُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن
رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ
﴿١٣٣﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ فِى ٱلسَّرَّآءِ
وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَٱلْكَٰظِمِينَ ٱلْغَيْظَ
وَٱلْعَافِينَ عَنِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ
ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾ وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا
فَعَلُوا۟ فَٰحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ
ذَكَرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ فَٱسْتَغْفَرُوا۟ لِذُنُوبِهِمْ
وَمَن يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ وَلَمْ
يُصِرُّوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا۟ وَهُمْ
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ جَزَآؤُهُم
مَّغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَجَنَّٰتٌ تَجْرِى
مِن تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا
وَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ ٱلْعَٰمِلِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾ قَدْ خَلَتْ
مِن قَبْلِكُمْ سُنَنٌ فَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
فَٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُكَذِّبِينَ
﴿١٣٧﴾

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99. The existence of interest in a society generates two kinds of moral disease. It breeds greed and avarice, meanness and selfishness among those who receive interest. At the same time, those who have to pay interest develop strong feelings of hatred, resentment, spite and jealousy. God intimates to the believers that the attributes bred by the spread of interest are the exact opposite of those which develop as a result of spending in the way of God, and that it is through the latter rather than the former that man can achieve God's forgiveness and Paradise. (For further explanation see *Sūrah* 2, n. 320 above.)

(138) This is a plain exposition for men, and a guidance and admonition for the God-fearing.

(139) Do not, then, either lose heart or grieve: for you shall surely gain the upper hand if you are true men of faith. (140) If a wound has befallen you a similar wound has already befallen the people who are opposed to you.[100] We make such movements to men in turn so that Allah might mark out those who are the true men of faith and select from among you those who do really bear witness (to the Truth):[101] for Allah does not love the wrong-doers, (141) and makes men go through trials in order that He might purge the believers and blot out those who deny the Truth.

هَٰذَا بَيَانٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ
لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٨﴾ وَلَا تَهِنُوا
وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِن كُنتُم
مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ إِن يَمْسَسْكُمْ قَرْحٌ
فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ قَرْحٌ مِّثْلُهُ
وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ
وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَيَتَّخِذَ
مِنكُمْ شُهَدَاءَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ
﴿١٤٠﴾ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
وَيَمْحَقَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾

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100. This alludes to the Battle of Badr. The intention is to point out to the Muslims that if the unbelievers were not demoralized by the setback they suffered at Badr then the Muslims should not be disheartened by the setback they suffered in the Battle of Uḥud.

101. The actual words of this verse, وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنكُمْ شُهَدَاءَ can be interpreted in two ways. One meaning could be that God wanted to select some of them so that He could bestow upon them the honour of martyrdom. The second meaning could be that out of the hotch-potch of true believers and hypocrites which their community consisted of at that moment, God wanted to sift those who were truly His witnesses over all mankind. (See Qur'ān 2: 143 – Ed.)

(142) Did you think that you would enter Paradise even though Allah has not yet seen who among you strove hard in His way and remained steadfast? (143) You previously longed for death (in the way of Allah): now you have faced it, observing it with your own eyes.[102]

(144) Muḥammad is no more than a Messenger, and Messengers have passed away before him. If, then, he were to die or be slain will you turn about on your heels?[103] Whoever turns about on his heels can in no way harm Allah. As for the grateful ones, Allah will soon reward them.

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا
يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنكُمْ
وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٤٢﴾ وَلَقَدْ كُنتُمْ
تَمَنَّوْنَ الْمَوْتَ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَلْقَوْهُ فَقَدْ
رَأَيْتُمُوهُ وَأَنتُمْ تَنظُرُونَ ﴿١٤٣﴾ وَمَا
مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِهِ
الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِن مَّاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ
انقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَن يَنقَلِبْ
عَلَىٰ عَقِبَيْهِ فَلَن يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا
وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

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102. This is with reference to those Companions who had urged the Prophet to go out of Madina and take on the enemy there because of their ardent desire for martyrdom. (See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 38 – Ed.)

103. When the rumour of the Prophet's martyrdom spread during the battle, it disheartened most of the Companions. The hypocrites who were in the Muslim camp began to advise the believers to approach 'Abd Allāh b. Ubayy so that he might secure protection for them from Abū Sufyān. Some went so far as to say that had Muḥammad really been the Messenger of God he would not have been put to death, and for that reason they counselled people to revert to their ancestral faith. It is in this context that the Muslims are now told that if their devotion to the truth is wholly bound up with the person of Muḥammad (peace be on him), and if their submission to God is so lukewarm that his demise would cause them to plunge back into the disbelief they had cast off, then they should bear in mind the fact that Islam does not need them.

(145) It is not given to any soul to die except with the leave of Allah, and at an appointed time.[104] And he who desires his reward in this world, We shall grant him the reward of this world; and he who desires the reward of the Other World,[105] We shall grant him the reward of the Other World. And soon shall We reward the ones who are grateful.[106] ►

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَن تَمُوتَ إِلَّا
بِإِذْنِ ٱللَّهِ كِتَٰبًا مُّؤَجَّلًا ۗ وَمَن يُرِدْ
ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا وَمَن يُرِدْ
ثَوَابَ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا ۚ
وَسَنَجْزِى ٱلشَّٰكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

104. The purpose of this directive is to bring home to the Muslims that it would be futile for them to try to flee from death. No one can either die before or survive the moment determined for death by God. Hence one should not waste one's time thinking how to escape death. Instead, one should take stock of one's activities and see whether one's efforts have either been directed merely to one's well-being in this world or to well-being in the Hereafter.

105. The word *thawāb* denotes recompense and reward. The 'reward of this world' signifies the totality of benefits and advantages which a man receives as a consequence of his actions and efforts within the confines of this world. The 'reward of the Other World' denotes the benefits that a man will receive in the lasting World to Come as the fruits of his actions and efforts. From the Islamic point of view, the crucial question bearing upon human morals is whether a man keeps his attention focused on the worldly results of his endeavours or on the results which will acrue to him in the Next World.

106. The 'ones who are grateful' are those who fully appreciate God's favour in making the true religion available to them, and thereby intimating to them knowledge of a realm that is infinitely vaster than this world. Such people appreciate that God has graciously informed them of the truth so that the consequences of human endeavour are not confined to the brief span of earthly life but cover a vast expanse, embracing both the present life and the much more important life of the Hereafter.

A grateful man is he who, having gained this breadth of outlook and having developed this long-range perception of the ultimate consequences of things, persists in acts of righteousness out of his faith in God and his confidence in God's assurance that they will bear fruit in the Hereafter.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(146) Many were the Prophets on whose side a large number of God-devoted men fought: they neither lost heart for all they had to suffer in the way of Allah nor did they weaken nor did they abase themselves.[107] Allah loves such steadfast ones. (147) And all they said was this: 'Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, and our excesses, and set our feet firm, and succour us against those who deny the Truth.' (148) Thereupon Allah granted them the reward of this world as well as a better reward of the World to Come.. Allah loves those who do good.

(149) Believers! If you follow those who deny the Truth, they will drive you back on your heels,[108] and you will turn about, losers.

وَكَأَيِّن مِّن نَّبِيٍّ قَٰتَلَ مَعَهُۥ رِبِّيُّونَ
كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا۟ لِمَآ أَصَابَهُمْ فِى سَبِيلِ
ٱللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا۟ وَمَا ٱسْتَكَانُوا۟ وَٱللَّهُ
يُحِبُّ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾ وَمَا كَانَ قَوْلَهُمْ
إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوا۟ رَبَّنَا ٱغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا
وَإِسْرَافَنَا فِىٓ أَمْرِنَا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا
وَٱنصُرْنَا عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾
فَـَٔاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ثَوَابَ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَحُسْنَ
ثَوَابِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ وَٱللَّهُ يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٤٨﴾
يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِن تُطِيعُوا۟
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ يَرُدُّوكُمْ
عَلَىٰٓ أَعْقَٰبِكُمْ فَتَنقَلِبُوا۟ خَٰسِرِينَ
﴿١٤٩﴾

He does so even though he may sometimes find that, far from bearing fruit, righteousness leads to privation and suffering in this world.

The ungrateful ones are those who persist in a narrow preoccupation with earthly matters. They are those who disregard the evil consequences of unrighteousness in the Hereafter, seizing everything which appears to yield benefits and advantages in this world, and who are not prepared to devote their time and energy to those acts of goodness which promise to bear fruit in the Hereafter and which are either unlikely to yield earthly advantages or are fraught with risks. Such people are ungrateful and lack appreciation of the valuable knowledge vouchsafed to them by God.

107. They did not surrender to the followers of falsehood merely because of their numerical inferiority and lack of resources.

108. That is, they would push them back into the same state of unbelief from which they had extricated themselves. Since the Battle of Uḥud the

(150) But Allah is your Protector, and He is the best of helpers. (151) We will cast terror into the hearts of those who have denied the Truth since they have associated others with Allah in His divinity – something for which He has sent down no sanction. The Fire is their abode; how bad the resting place of the wrong-doers will be!

(152) Allah surely fulfilled His promise (of succour) when you were slaying them by His leave until the moment when you flagged and quarrelled among yourselves about the matter, and acted against the order of (the Prophet). Soon He showed you what you had intensely desired – for some among you sought this world and some of you sought the Next. Thereupon, in order to put you to a test He turned you away from your foes. Still He pardoned you after that[109] for Allah is Bounteous to those who believe.

بَلِ ٱللَّهُ مَوْلَىٰكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ
ٱلنَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾ سَنُلْقِى فِى قُلُوبِ
ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱلرُّعْبَ بِمَآ
أَشْرَكُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِۦ
سُلْطَٰنًا ۖ وَمَأْوَىٰهُمُ ٱلنَّارُ ۚ
وَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿١٥١﴾
وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ وَعْدَهُۥٓ
إِذْ تَحُسُّونَهُم بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۖ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا
فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَٰزَعْتُمْ فِى ٱلْأَمْرِ
وَعَصَيْتُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ مَآ أَرَىٰكُم
مَّا تُحِبُّونَ ۚ مِنكُم مَّن يُرِيدُ
ٱلدُّنْيَا وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرِيدُ
ٱلْءَاخِرَةَ ۚ ثُمَّ صَرَفَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ
لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ ۖ وَلَقَدْ عَفَا عَنكُمْ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

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hypocrites and the Jews had constantly propagated the idea that, had Muḥammad been a true Prophet, he would not have suffered the reverse that he encountered in that battle. This reverse was offered as proof that Muḥammad (peace be on him) was an ordinary person whose fortunes varied, like those of other men, between victory and defeat. They further contended that the support and patronage of God which Muḥammad claimed to enjoy was a sham.

(153) Recall when you were fleeing without casting even a side glance at anyone, and the Messenger was calling out to you from the rear.[110] Then Allah requited you by inflicting grief after grief upon you[111] so as to instruct you neither to grieve for the losses you might suffer nor for the afflictions that might befall you. Allah knows all that you do.

(154) Then, after inflicting this grief, He sent down an inner peace upon you – a sleep which overtook some of you.[112] ►

۞ إِذْ تُصْعِدُونَ
وَلَا تَلْوُۥنَ عَلَىٰٓ أَحَدٍ
وَٱلرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ فِىٓ
أُخْرَىٰكُمْ فَأَثَٰبَكُمْ غَمًّۢا بِغَمٍّ
لِّكَيْلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ عَلَىٰ مَا
فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا مَآ أَصَٰبَكُمْ ۗ
وَٱللَّهُ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥٣﴾ ثُمَّ
أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ٱلْغَمِّ أَمَنَةً نُّعَاسًا
يَغْشَىٰ طَآئِفَةً مِّنكُمْ ۖ

109. The failure of the Muslims was of such a serious nature that had God not pardoned them they might have been obliterated there and then. It was out of God's grace, support and patronage that after the Muslims had been overpowered by the enemy the latter were seized with perplexity and confusion, and withdrew.

110. When subjected to a sudden two-pronged attack the Muslims scattered; some fled to Madina while others climbed Mount Uḥud. Despite this, the Prophet (peace be on him) did not move from his position. The enemy surrounded him on all sides and only a small party of ten to twelve followers was left with him. Even at that critical moment his feet remained firm and he continued to summon his fleeing followers towards himself. (See Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, pp. 237, 240 and 241 – Ed.)

111. The 'grief' referred to in this verse had many causes: (i) by the setback the Muslims suffered on the battlefield and by the rumour that the Prophet (peace be on him) had been martyred; (ii) by the fact that a large number of believers had been killed and wounded; and (iii) by the fact that nothing was known about what was happening to the Muslim families left behind in Madina. For it was possible that the enemy was greater in numbers than the total population of Madina, and that it might break through the defences of the battered Muslim army and enter and ravage the Muslim city.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

Those who were concerned merely about themselves, entertaining false notions about Allah – the notions of the Age of Ignorance – asked: 'Have we any say in the matter?' Tell them: 'Truly, all power of decision rests solely with Allah.' Indeed, they conceal in their hearts what they would not reveal to you, saying: 'If we had any power of decision, we would not have been slain here.' Say: 'Even if you had been in your houses, those for whom slaying had been appointed would have gone forth to the places where they were to be slain.' And all this happened so that Allah might test your secret thoughts and purge your hearts of all impurities. Allah knows well what is in the breasts of men.

(155) Surely those of them who turned their backs on the day when the two armies met (at Uḥud) did so because Satan made them slip because of some of their lapses. But Allah has pardoned them; He is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

وَطَآئِفَةٌ قَدْ أَهَمَّتْهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ
يَظُنُّونَ بِٱللَّهِ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ ظَنَّ ٱلْجَٰهِلِيَّةِ
يَقُولُونَ هَل لَّنَا مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ مِن شَىْءٍ
قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْأَمْرَ كُلَّهُۥ لِلَّهِ يُخْفُونَ فِىٓ
أَنفُسِهِم مَّا لَا يُبْدُونَ لَكَ يَقُولُونَ
لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ شَىْءٌ مَّا قُتِلْنَا
هَٰهُنَا قُل لَّوْ كُنتُمْ فِى بُيُوتِكُمْ لَبَرَزَ
ٱلَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقَتْلُ إِلَىٰ
مَضَاجِعِهِمْ وَلِيَبْتَلِىَ ٱللَّهُ مَا فِى
صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِى
قُلُوبِكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ
﴿١٥٤﴾ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوْا۟ مِنكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْتَقَى
ٱلْجَمْعَانِ إِنَّمَا ٱسْتَزَلَّهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ
بِبَعْضِ مَا كَسَبُوا۟ وَلَقَدْ عَفَا ٱللَّهُ
عَنْهُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥٥﴾

112. A strange phenomenon was then experienced by certain Muslim soldiers. Abū Ṭalḥah, who took part in the battle, states that the Muslims were seized by such drowsiness that their swords were slipping from their hands. (For several Traditions stating this incident, including one related by Abū Ṭalḥah, see Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, pp. 295–6 – Ed.)

(156) Believers, do not behave like those who disbelieved and say to their brothers (who meet some mishap) in the course of their journey for fighting: 'Had they remained with us, they would not have died nor been slain.' Allah makes such thoughts the cause of deep regrets in their hearts.[113] For in truth it is Allah alone who grants life and deals death. Allah sees all that you do. (157) And were you to be slain or to die in the way of Allah, then surely Allah's forgiveness and mercy are better than all the goods they amass. (158) And were you to die or be slain, it is to Allah that you will all be mustered.

(159) It was thanks to Allah's mercy that you were gentle to them. Had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from you. So pardon them, and pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel from them in matters of importance. ►

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُواْ وَقَالُواْ لِإِخۡوَٰنِهِمۡ إِذَا ضَرَبُواْ
فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ أَوۡ كَانُواْ غُزّٗى لَّوۡ كَانُواْ
عِندَنَا مَا مَاتُواْ وَمَا قُتِلُواْ لِيَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ
ذَٰلِكَ حَسۡرَةٗ فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُحۡيِۦ
وَيُمِيتُۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعۡمَلُونَ بَصِيرٞ ١٥٦
وَلَئِن قُتِلۡتُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡ مُتُّمۡ
لَمَغۡفِرَةٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَرَحۡمَةٌ خَيۡرٞ مِّمَّا
يَجۡمَعُونَ ١٥٧ وَلَئِن مُّتُّمۡ أَوۡ قُتِلۡتُمۡ
لَإِلَى ٱللَّهِ تُحۡشَرُونَ ١٥٨ فَبِمَا رَحۡمَةٖ
مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لِنتَ لَهُمۡۖ وَلَوۡ كُنتَ فَظًّا
غَلِيظَ ٱلۡقَلۡبِ لَٱنفَضُّواْ مِنۡ حَوۡلِكَۖ
فَٱعۡفُ عَنۡهُمۡ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لَهُمۡ
وَشَاوِرۡهُمۡ فِي ٱلۡأَمۡرِۖ

113. Such ideas had no solid ground. God's decree regarding the time of one's death cannot be deferred. Those who lack faith in God and think that everything is dependent on their own scheming and effort rather than on the overpowering Will of God become victims of perpetual remorse, since they never cease to reflect how a slightly different circumstance or slightly altered strategy could have led to an altogether different and wholesome result.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

And when you are resolved on a course of action place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him). (160) If Allah helps you none shall prevail over you; if He forsakes you then who can help you? It is in Allah that the believers should put their trust.

(161) It is not for a Prophet to defraud;[114] and whoever defrauds shall bring with him the fruits of his fraud on the Day of Resurrection, when every human being shall be paid in full what he has earned, and shall not be wronged. (162) Is he who follows the good pleasure of Allah like him who is laden with Allah's wrath and whose abode is Hell? How evil that is for a resting-place! (163) They vary greatly in rank in the sight of Allah, and Allah sees what they do. (164) Surely Allah conferred a great favour on the believers when He raised from among them a Messenger to recite to them His signs, and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and Wisdom. For before that they were in manifest error.

فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
يُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ﴿١٥٩﴾ إِن يَنصُرْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ
فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِن يَخْذُلْكُمْ فَمَن
ذَا ٱلَّذِى يَنصُرُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ ۗ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ
فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾ وَمَا كَانَ
لِنَبِىٍّ أَن يَغُلَّ ۚ وَمَن يَغْلُلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا غَلَّ
يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۚ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ
مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾
أَفَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ رِضْوَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ كَمَنۢ بَآءَ
بِسَخَطٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَأْوَىٰهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۚ
وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٦٢﴾ هُمْ دَرَجَٰتٌ عِندَ
ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾
لَقَدْ مَنَّ ٱللَّهُ عَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ
فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْهِمْ
ءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن
كَانُوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ لَفِى ضَلَٰلٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٦٤﴾

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114. When the archers, whom the Prophet had posted to defend the army against any attack from the rear, saw that the spoils of the enemy

(165) And how come when a calamity befell you, you began to ask: 'How has this come about?'[115] even though the enemy has suffered at your hands (in the Battle of Badr) double what you have suffered![116] Say: 'This calamity has been brought about by yourselves.'[117] Surely Allah is All-Powerful.[118] ►

أَوَلَمَّآ أَصَٰبَتۡكُم مُّصِيبَةٞ قَدۡ أَصَبۡتُم مِّثۡلَيۡهَا قُلۡتُمۡ أَنَّىٰ هَٰذَاۖ قُلۡ هُوَ مِنۡ عِندِ أَنفُسِكُمۡۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ١٦٥

were being collected, they feared that the spoils might fall in their entirety to the lot of the soldiers who were then collecting them, and that they might, therefore, be deprived of their share. It was this idea which had impelled them to leave their posts. When the Prophet returned to Madina after the battle he asked them to explain the cause of their disobedience. When he had heard their unconvincing stories he told them: 'You thought that we would act dishonestly and would not deliver you your share.' (See Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, commentary on this verse – Ed.) The verse alludes to this here. The purpose is to impress upon them that the Messenger of God himself was the commander of their army and that all their affairs were in his hands alone. What made them feel that their interests were not secure even in the hands of God's Messenger? Did they think that a division of spoils under the direct supervision of the Prophet would be made in any manner other than that dictated by absolute honesty, trustworthiness and justice?

115. The more high-ranking Companions were too well aware of reality to fall prey to any misunderstandings. The ordinary believers, however, had thought that as long as God's Messenger was in their midst and as long as they enjoyed God's support and help the unbelievers could never triumph over them. Hence, when they suffered defeat at the Battle of Uḥud, their expectations were shaken and they began to wonder why things had taken the course they had. They wondered why they had been defeated even though they had fought for the sake of God's true religion with God's support, and the Messenger of God was with them on the battlefield. Furthermore, they were worried that the defeat had been at the hands of those who were out to destroy God's true religion. These verses seek to allay this sense of anxiety and rid their minds of doubt and suspicion.

116. In the Battle of Uḥud seventy Muslims were martyred. In the Battle of Badr, seventy unbelievers were killed and seventy taken as captives.

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(166) What befell you on the day when the two hosts met was by the leave of Allah, and in order that He might mark out those who believe (167) and those who are hypocrites. And when these hypocrites were asked: 'Come and fight in the way of Allah', or (at least) 'defend yourselves', they answered: 'If we but knew that there would be fighting, we would certainly have followed.'[119] They were nearer then to infidelity than to faith. They utter from their mouths what is not in their hearts. Allah knows well what they conceal. (168) These are the ones who stayed away, saying about their brothers: 'Had they followed us, they would not have been slain.' Say: 'If you speak the truth then avert death when it comes to you.'

وَمَآ أَصَٰبَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْتَقَى ٱلْجَمْعَانِ فَبِإِذْنِ
ٱللَّهِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٦٦﴾ وَلِيَعْلَمَ
ٱلَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا۟ ۚ وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا۟ قَٰتِلُوا۟ فِى
سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَوِ ٱدْفَعُوا۟ ۖ قَالُوا۟ لَوْ نَعْلَمُ
قِتَالًا لَّٱتَّبَعْنَٰكُمْ ۗ هُمْ لِلْكُفْرِ
يَوْمَئِذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلْإِيمَٰنِ ۚ
يَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَٰهِهِم مَّا لَيْسَ فِى
قُلُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ ﴿١٦٧﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ لِإِخْوَٰنِهِمْ وَقَعَدُوا۟ لَوْ
أَطَاعُونَا مَا قُتِلُوا۟ ۗ قُلْ فَٱدْرَءُوا۟ عَنْ
أَنفُسِكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتَ إِن كُنتُمْ
صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

117. The calamity that had befallen them was the outcome of their own weaknesses and mistakes. They had not remained sufficiently patient, they had acted, in certain respects, in a manner inconsistent with the dictates of piety, they had disobeyed the command that had been given them, they were lured by material wealth and they disputed and quarrelled among themselves. After all this, was it still necessary to ask what caused the debacle?

118. If God has the power to make them victorious He also has the power to bring about their defeat.

119. When 'Abd Allāh b. Ubayy decided to withdraw from the battlefield with his men several Muslims attempted to persuade him not to do so. Ibn Ubayy replied that he was sure that there would be no fighting that day, and he assured them that had he expected fighting to take place, he would have gone along with them.

(169) Think not of those slain in the way of Allah as dead.[120] Indeed they are living, and with their Lord they have their sustenance, (170) rejoicing in what Allah has bestowed upon them out of His bounty,[121] jubilant that neither fear nor grief shall come upon the believers left behind in the world who have not yet joined them. (171) They rejoice at the favours and bounties of Allah, and at the awareness that Allah will not cause the reward of the believers to be lost.

(172) There were those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger[122] after injury had smitten them[123] – for all those who do good and fear Allah there is a mighty reward. (173) When people said to them: 'Behold, a host has gathered around you and you should fear them', it only increased their faith and they answered: 'Allah is Sufficient for us; and what an excellent Guardian He is!'

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا۟ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَمْوَٰتًۢا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَآءٌ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾ فَرِحِينَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَيَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَلْحَقُوا۟ بِهِم مِّنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

۞ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِنِعْمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْتَجَابُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَٱلرَّسُولِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَآ أَصَابَهُمُ ٱلْقَرْحُ ۚ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ وَٱتَّقَوْا۟ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٢﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّ ٱلنَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا۟ لَكُمْ فَٱخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَٰنًا وَقَالُوا۟ حَسْبُنَا ٱللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ ٱلْوَكِيلُ ﴿١٧٣﴾

120. For an explanation see *Sūrah* 2, n. 155 above.

121. There is a Tradition from the Prophet that he who leaves the world after having lived righteously is greeted with a life so felicitous that he never wishes to return to the world. The only exception to this are martyrs who wish to be sent back to the world so that they may once again attain martyrdom and thereby enjoy that unique joy, bliss and ecstasy which one experiences at the time of laying down one's life for God. (Aḥmad b.

(174) So they returned with a mighty favour and a great bounty from Allah having suffered no harm. They followed the good pleasure of Allah, and Allah is the Lord of great bounty. (175) It was Satan who suggested to you the fear of his allies. Do not fear them; fear Me, if you truly believe.[124]

فَانقَلَبُوا بِنِعْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ لَّمْ
يَمْسَسْهُمْ سُوءٌ وَاتَّبَعُوا رِضْوَانَ اللَّهِ
وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٧٤﴾ إِنَّمَا ذَٰلِكُمُ
الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ
وَخَافُونِ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧٥﴾

Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. III, 103, 126, 153, 173, 251, 276, 278, 284, 289; Bukhārī, 'Tafsīr al-Qur'ān', 6 and 21; Muslim, 'Al-Imārah', 108, 109, 121 – Ed.)

122. When, after the Battle of Uḥud, the Makkan polytheists had travelled several stages of their journey, they began to tell themselves what a mistake they had made in allowing the opportunity to crush the power of Muḥammad to slip out of their hands. At one place they halted and deliberated among themselves about launching a second attack on Madina. They failed, however, to muster sufficient courage and carried on to Makka. The Prophet, for his part, also realized that they might attack once again. On the second day of Uḥud, therefore, he gathered the Muslims and urged them to pursue the unbelievers. Even though this was a highly critical moment, the true men of faith girded their loins and were prepared to lay down their lives at the behest of the Prophet. They accompanied him to Ḥamrā' al-Asad, eight miles from Madina. The present verse refers to these dedicated men.

123. These few verses were revealed almost one year after the Battle of Uḥud. As they are connected with the events of the battle they were included in the present discourse.

124. While returning from the Battle of Uḥud, Abū Sufyān challenged the Muslims to another encounter at Badr the following year. But when the appointed time arrived, Abū Sufyān's courage failed him on account of the famine prevailing in Makka that year. As a face-saving device he arranged to send an agent to Madina who spread the rumour that tremendous war preparations were afoot among the Quraysh, and that they were trying to muster a huge army which would be so powerful that no other power in the whole of Arabia would resist it. The purpose of this rumour was to overawe the Muslims and discourage them from advancing

(176) Let not those who run towards disbelief grieve you; they shall not hurt Allah in the least. Allah will not provide for them any share in the Next Life. A mighty punishment awaits them. (177) Indeed those who have purchased unbelief in exchange for faith shall not hurt Allah in the least. Theirs shall be a painful chastisement. (178) Do not let the unbelievers imagine that the respite We give them is good for them. We give them respite so that they may grow in wickedness. A humiliating chastisement lies in store for them.

وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ ٱلَّذِينَ يُسَٰرِعُونَ فِي ٱلْكُفْرِ ۚ
إِنَّهُمْ لَن يَضُرُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ شَيْـًٔا ۗ يُرِيدُ ٱللَّهُ
أَلَّا يَجْعَلَ لَهُمْ حَظًّا فِي ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٦﴾ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱشْتَرَوُا۟
ٱلْكُفْرَ بِٱلْإِيمَٰنِ لَن يَضُرُّوا۟ ٱللَّهَ
شَيْـًٔا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٧﴾
وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَنَّمَا نُمْلِي لَهُمْ
خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّمَا نُمْلِي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوٓا۟
إِثْمًا ۚ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

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towards Makka, so that when the confrontation did not take place it would be blamed on the timidity of the Muslims. The effect of this measure was such that when the Prophet (peace be on him) urged the Muslims to accompany him to Badr the initial response was not encouraging. Finally, the Prophet publicly announced that if no one would accompany him, he would go alone. In response, fifteen hundred devotees expressed their willingness and accompanied him to Badr. Abū Sufyān set out with two thousand men but after travelling for two days he told his men that it seemed unwise to fight and that they would return the following year for the proposed encounter. Thus he and his men retreated. The Prophet and his Companions stayed at Badr for eight days awaiting the threatened encounter. Meanwhile, they conducted business with a trade caravan which yielded them considerable profit. Later, when it became known that the unbelievers had gone back to Makka, the Prophet returned to Madina. (See Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, pp. 209 f.; Ibn Isḥāq, *Life of Muḥammad*, pp. 447 f. – Ed.)

(179) Allah will not let the believers stay in the state they are:[125] He will set the wicked apart from the good. Allah is not going to disclose to you what is hidden in the realm beyond the reach of perception,[126] but He chooses from among His Messengers whom He wills (to intimate such knowledge). Believe, then, in Allah and in His Messengers; and if you believe and become God-fearing, yours will be a great reward.

(180) Those who are niggardly about what Allah has granted them out of His bounty think that niggardliness is good for them; it is bad for them. What they were niggardly about will turn into a halter round their necks on the Day of Resurrection. To Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth;[127] and Allah is well aware of what you do.

مَّا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَآ
أَنتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ ٱلْخَبِيثَ مِنَ
ٱلطَّيِّبِ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيُطْلِعَكُمْ عَلَى ٱلْغَيْبِ
وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَجْتَبِى مِن رُّسُلِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ ۖ
فَـَٔامِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ ۚ وَإِن تُؤْمِنُوا۟
وَتَتَّقُوا۟ فَلَكُمْ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٩﴾ وَلَا
يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَبْخَلُونَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ
ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۖ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ
لَّهُمْ ۖ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخِلُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَوْمَ
ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَٰثُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٨٠﴾

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125. That is, God does not want to see the Muslim community in a hotch-potch condition with the true men of faith indistinguishable from the hypocrites.

126. This means that God does not resort to revelation to provide information as to whether specific individuals are true men of faith or hypocrites. God creates, instead, certain situations in which the faith of those who profess to believe is severely tested. The result is that the man of faith stands out clearly from the hypocrite.

127. Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God alone. Hence the possession and use of anything by man is purely transient. For

(181) Allah has heard the saying of those who said: 'Allah is poor, and we are rich.'[128] We shall record what they have said, and the fact of their slaying the Prophets unjustly, and we shall say to them: 'Taste now the torment of the Fire. (182) That is in recompense for what you have done.' Allah does no wrong to His servants.

(183) To those who say: 'Allah has directed us that we accept none as Messenger until he makes an offering that the fire will consume', say: 'Other Messengers came to you before me with clear signs, and with the sign you have mentioned. So why did you slay them, if what you say is true?'[129] ►

لَّقَدْ سَمِعَ ٱللَّهُ قَوْلَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّ
ٱللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَآءُ سَنَكْتُبُ
مَا قَالُوا۟ وَقَتْلَهُمُ ٱلْأَنۢبِيَآءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ
وَنَقُولُ ذُوقُوا۟ عَذَابَ ٱلْحَرِيقِ
﴿١٨١﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ
ٱللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٨٢﴾
ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَهِدَ إِلَيْنَآ
أَلَّا نُؤْمِنَ لِرَسُولٍ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَنَا
بِقُرْبَانٍ تَأْكُلُهُ ٱلنَّارُ قُلْ قَدْ
جَآءَكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِى بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ
وَبِٱلَّذِى قُلْتُمْ فَلِمَ قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ إِن
كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

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everyone will be dispossessed of his temporary belongings, and everything will ultimately return to and abide with God. If anyone therefore spends openheartedly in the way of God out of his temporary possessions he does so from property which, ultimately, belongs to God alone. Anyone who hoards his possessions and fails to spend them in the way of God is indeed stupid.

128. This statement was made by the Jews. On the revelation of the Qur'ānic verse (2: 245): 'Who of you will lend Allah a goodly loan?', the Jews began to ridicule it and said: 'Look, God has now gone bankrupt and has begun to beg of His creatures for loans.' (For this statement made by the Jews see the Tradition mentioned by Ibn Kathīr in his comments on this verse – Ed.)

129. The Bible mentions at several places that the token of Divine acceptance of a person's sacrificial offering was the appearance of a mysterious fire which consumed the offering. (See Judges 6: 20–1 and 13: 19–20; 2 Chronicles 7: 1–2.) The Bible does not state, however, that the

► *Translation continued on next page.*

(184) Now, if they give the lie to you, then other Messengers who came bearing clear signs and scriptures and the illuminating Book were also given the lie before you. (185) Everyone is bound to taste death and you shall receive your full reward on the Day of Resurrection. Then, whoever is spared the Fire and is admitted to Paradise has indeed been successful. The life of this world is merely an illusory enjoyment.[130]

فَإِن كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ رُسُلٌ مِّن
قَبْلِكَ جَآءُو بِٱلْبَيِّنَٰتِ وَٱلزُّبُرِ
وَٱلْكِتَٰبِ ٱلْمُنِيرِ ﴿١٨٤﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ
ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۗ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّوْنَ
أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۖ فَمَن
زُحْزِحَ عَنِ ٱلنَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ ٱلْجَنَّةَ
فَقَدْ فَازَ ۗ وَمَا ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَآ إِلَّا
مَتَٰعُ ٱلْغُرُورِ ﴿١٨٥﴾

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consuming fire was an indispensable token of prophethood and that anyone not endowed with that miracle could not be a Prophet. The Jews in discussing the claim of Muḥammad (peace be on him) to be a Messenger of God brought up the question of this miraculous sign, and used it as a pretext for denying that claim. There was even clearer evidence of the Jews' hostility to Truth: they had not hesitated to murder a number of Prophets who had been endowed with the miracle of consuming fire. The Bible mentions, for example, the Prophet Elijah who had challenged the worshippers of Ba'l to sacrifice a bull, promising that he too would sacrifice a bull. He stated that the offering of the one who was truthful would be consumed by the miraculous fire. The confrontation took place before a large crowd and it was Elijah's sacrifice which was consumed by the fire. This so antagonized the Ba'l-worshipping Queen that the henpecked King decided to put the Prophet Elijah to death. Elijah was forced to leave his homeland and take refuge in the mountains of Sinai. (See 1 Kings 18 and 19.) The Jews are told in effect: 'How dare you ask for the miracle of the consuming fire when in the past you have not even refrained from murdering Prophets who performed that miracle?'

130. Whoever considers the effects of his actions in this earthly life to be of crucial significance, and sees in them the criteria of right and wrong, the criteria of that which leads either to one's ultimate salvation or to one's doom, falls prey to a serious misconception. The fact that a person is outstandingly successful in life does not necessarily prove that he is either on the right path or is the recipient of any special favour from God. Similarly, even if a person is surrounded by trials and hardships, it does

(186) (Believers!) You will certainly be put to test in respect of your properties and lives, and you will certainly hear many hurtful things from those who were granted the Book before you and those who have associated others with Allah in His divinity. If you remain patient and God-fearing[131] this indeed is a matter of great resolution. (187) And recall when Allah took a covenant from those who were given the Book: 'You shall explain it to men and not hide it.'[132] Then they cast the Book behind their backs, and sold it away for a trivial gain. Evil indeed is their bargain. (188) Do not think that those who exult in their misdeeds and love to be praised for what indeed they have not done,[133] do not think that they are secure from chastisement. A painful chastisement awaits them. (189) To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is All-Powerful.

۞ لَتُبْلَوُنَّ فِىٓ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ
وَأَنفُسِكُمْ وَلَتَسْمَعُنَّ مِنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ مِن
قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوٓا۟
أَذًى كَثِيرًا ۚ وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا۟
وَتَتَّقُوا۟ فَإِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ
ٱلْأُمُورِ ﴿١٨٦﴾ وَإِذْ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ
ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُۥ لِلنَّاسِ
وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُۥ فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَآءَ
ظُهُورِهِمْ وَٱشْتَرَوْا۟ بِهِۦ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ
فَبِئْسَ مَا يَشْتَرُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾ لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ
ٱلَّذِينَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَآ أَتَوا۟ وَّيُحِبُّونَ أَن
يُحْمَدُوا۟ بِمَا لَمْ يَفْعَلُوا۟ فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّهُم
بِمَفَازَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلْعَذَابِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ
وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٨٩﴾

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not prove that he has either strayed from the right way or is out of favour with God. The earthly results of a man's actions are often quite different from the ones he will see in the Next Life. What is of true importance is what will happen in that eternal life rather than in this transient one.

131. Muslims should not lose their self-control in the face of the Jews' invidious taunts and slander. The Jews' accusations, debased talk and false propaganda should not provoke the Muslims into adopting a posture either

inconsistent with truth and justice or with the dignity, decorum and high standards of moral conduct that become men of faith.

132. Although the Jews remembered that some Prophets had been endowed with the miracle of consuming fire, they conveniently forgot their covenant with God at the time they were entrusted with the Scripture, and their mission as the bearers of the Scripture.

The 'covenant' to which this verse alludes is mentioned at several places in the Bible. In the last sermon of Moses, cited in Deuteronomy, he again and again calls the attention of Israel to the covenant in the following words: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. And these words which I command shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.' (Deuteronomy 6: 4–9.)

Then, in his last testament Moses said: 'And on the day you pass over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall set up large stones, and plaster them with plaster and you shall write upon them all the words of this law, when you pass over to enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you. And when you have passed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you this day, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster.' (Deuteronomy 27: 2–4.) When the Levites were handed a copy of the Torah, they were instructed to gather men, women and children every seventh year on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles and to recite the entire text to them. But their indifference to the Book of God grew to such a point that seven hundred years later even the priests of the Temple of Solomon and the Jewish ruler of Jerusalem did not know that they had the Book of God with them. (See 2 Kings 22: 8–13.)

133. Such people expected praises to be lavished upon them for being God-fearing, devout and pious, for being sincere servants of the true faith, for being defenders of God's Law and for having reformed and purified the lives of people, even though none of this might be true. They wanted people to go about trumpeting that such and such a person had made great sacrifices in the cause of God and had sincerely guided people to the right way even though the facts might be the reverse of what they claimed.

(190) Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth,[134] and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of understanding (191) – those who remember Allah while standing, sitting or (reclining) on their backs, and reflect in the creation of the heavens and the earth,[135] (saying): 'Our Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory to You! Save us, then, from the chastisement of the Fire.[136] (192) Our Lord! Whomever You cause to enter the Fire, him You indeed bring to disgrace, and there will be none to succour the wrong-doers.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَٰطِلًا سُبْحَٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾ رَبَّنَآ إِنَّكَ مَن تُدْخِلِ ٱلنَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُۥ وَمَا لِلظَّٰلِمِينَ مِنْ أَنصَارٍ ﴿١٩٢﴾

134. This section constitutes the conclusion of the present *sūrah*. It is related not so much to the verses which immediately precede it as to the entire *sūrah*. In order to grasp its significance one should particularly bear in mind our introductory remarks to this *sūrah*. (See pp. 229 ff. above.)

135. This means that with the help of those signs one can easily arrive at the Truth, provided one is not indifferent to God and looks at the phenomenon of the universe thoughtfully.

136. When people look carefully at the order of the universe, it becomes clear to them that it is an order permeated by wisdom and intelligent purpose. It is altogether inconsistent with wisdom that the man endowed with moral consciousness and freedom of choice, the man gifted with reason and discretion, should not be held answerable for his deeds. This kind of reflection leads people to develop a strong conviction that the After-life is a reality. Thanks to this conviction, they begin to seek God's refuge from His punishment.

(193) Our Lord! Indeed we heard a crier calling to the faith saying: "Believe in your Lord"; so we did believe.[137] Our Lord, forgive us our sins, and wipe out our evil deeds and make us die with the truly pious.' (194) 'Our Lord, fulfil what You promised to us through Your Messengers, and disgrace us not on the Day of Resurrection; indeed You never go back on Your promise.'[138]

(195) Their Lord answered the Prayer thus: 'I will not suffer the work of any of you, whether male or female, to go to waste; each of you is from the other.[139] Those who emigrated and were driven out from their homesteads and were persecuted in My cause, and who fought and were slain, indeed I shall wipe out their evil deeds from them and shall certainly admit them to the gardens beneath which rivers flow.' This is their reward with their Lord; and with Allah lies the best reward.[140]

رَّبَّنَآ إِنَّنَا سَمِعۡنَا مُنَادِيٗا يُنَادِي
لِلۡإِيمَٰنِ أَنۡ ءَامِنُواْ بِرَبِّكُمۡ فَـَٔامَنَّاۚ
رَبَّنَا فَٱغۡفِرۡ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرۡ عَنَّا
سَيِّـَٔاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ ٱلۡأَبۡرَارِ ﴿١٩٣﴾
رَبَّنَا وَءَاتِنَا مَا وَعَدتَّنَا عَلَىٰ رُسُلِكَ
وَلَا تُخۡزِنَا يَوۡمَ ٱلۡقِيَٰمَةِۗ إِنَّكَ لَا تُخۡلِفُ
ٱلۡمِيعَادَ ﴿١٩٤﴾ فَٱسۡتَجَابَ لَهُمۡ رَبُّهُمۡ
أَنِّي لَآ أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَٰمِلٖ مِّنكُم مِّن
ذَكَرٍ أَوۡ أُنثَىٰۖ بَعۡضُكُم مِّنۢ بَعۡضٖۖ فَٱلَّذِينَ
هَاجَرُواْ وَأُخۡرِجُواْ مِن دِيَٰرِهِمۡ
وَأُوذُواْ فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَٰتَلُواْ وَقُتِلُواْ
لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنۡهُمۡ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمۡ
وَلَأُدۡخِلَنَّهُمۡ جَنَّٰتٖ تَجۡرِي مِن
تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ ثَوَابٗا مِّنۡ عِندِ ٱللَّهِۗ
وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥ حُسۡنُ ٱلثَّوَابِ ﴿١٩٥﴾

137. This observation also convinces them of the soundness of what the Prophets have propounded regarding the beginning and end of the universe, and of the way of life which they have prescribed.

138. Such people do not doubt the fact that God will fulfil His promises. What they do doubt is whether they will be reckoned among those for whom those promises were made. Hence they pray to God to make them worthy of His promised rewards. They are afraid lest they remain targets

(196) (O Messenger!) Do not let the strutting about of the unbelievers in the land deceive you. (197) This is but a little enjoyment, then their destination is Hell – what an evil resting place! (198) But those who fear their Lord: theirs shall be the gardens beneath which rivers flow and in which they will live forever: a hospitality from Allah Himself. And Allah's reward is best for the truly pious. (199) And among the People of the Book some believe in Allah and what has been revealed to you, and what has been revealed to them. They humble themselves before Allah, and do not sell Allah's revelations for a small price. For these men their reward is with their Lord. Allah is swift in His reckoning.

لَا يَغُرَّنَّكَ تَقَلُّبُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فِى
ٱلْبِلَٰدِ ﴿١٩٦﴾ مَتَٰعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ
جَهَنَّمُ ۚ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ ﴿١٩٧﴾ لَٰكِنِ ٱلَّذِينَ
ٱتَّقَوْا۟ رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ جَنَّٰتٌ تَجْرِى مِن
تَحْتِهَا ٱلْأَنْهَٰرُ خَٰلِدِينَ فِيهَا نُزُلًا
مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِّلْأَبْرَارِ
﴿١٩٨﴾ وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَمَن
يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ
أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَٰشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشْتَرُونَ
بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۗ
أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩٩﴾

of slander and ridicule by the unbelievers in this world, and then be disgraced in the Hereafter before the same unbelievers who may mock them once again saying that their faith has been of no avail to them.

139. All humans are equal in the sight of God. God does not have separate criteria for judging the male and the female, the master and the slave, the high and the low.

140. It is reported that some non-Muslims came to the Prophet and said that Moses had produced his staff and had been endowed with the miracle of the shining hand (see Qur'ān 7: 108; 20: 22), and that Jesus restored sight to the blind and cured the lepers (see Qur'ān 3/ 49). Other Prophets had also been granted miracles. What miracles, they enquired, could the Prophet perform? In response the Prophet recited all the verses from verse 190 to the end of this *sūrah*, adding that that was what he had brought.

(200) Believers, be steadfast, and vie in steadfastness,[141] stand firm in your faith, and hold Allah in fear that you may attain true success.	يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱصْبِرُوا۟ وَصَابِرُوا۟ وَرَابِطُوا۟ وَٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

141. The original Arabic word is صَابِرُوا , *ṣābirū*. This has two possible meanings. One is that whenever they are in confrontation with unbelievers, the believers should endure even greater hardships for their cause, and display a higher degree of fortitude than the unbelievers. The other is that the believers should try to excel one another in facing the opposition and hostility of unbelievers with courage and fortitude.

Glossary of Terms

'Ahd (covenant) in 2: 27, for instance, refers to the command issued by God to His servants. This *'ahd* consists of God's eternal command that His creatures are obligated to render their service, obedience and worship to Him alone.

Al-Ākhirah (After-Life, Hereafter, Next World). The term embraces the following ideas:

1. That man is answerable to God.
2. That the present order of existence will some day come to an end.
3. That when that happens, God will bring another order into being in which He will resurrect all human beings, gather them together and examine their conduct, and reward them with justice and mercy.
4. That those who are reckoned good will be sent to Paradise whereas the evil-doers will be consigned to Hell.
5. That the real measure of success or failure of a person is not the extent of his prosperity in the present life, but his success in the Next.

'Arsh literally means throne. The Qur'ān refers to God as the Lord of the Throne (9: 129). Mawdūdī holds that the main purpose of mentioning God as the Lord or Master of the Throne in the Qur'ān is to emphasize that God is the effective controller of the whole universe, that He not only reigns but also rules.

Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah consisted of about three or four hundred Companions who spent most of their time in the company of the Prophet (peace be on him). They acquired knowledge and had dedicated themselves wholly to serving Islam.

Āyah (pl. *āyāt*), means a sign (or 'token') which directs one to something important. In the Qur'ān the word has been used in four different senses: (1) sign or indication; (2) the phenomena of the universe (called *āyāt* of God for the reality to which the phenomena point is hidden behind the veil of appearances); (3) miracles performed by the Prophets; and (4) individual units (i.e. verses) of the Book of God.

Dhikr means remembrance. In the Islamic context, it is used in the sense of 'remembrance of God'. In verse 2: 199, *dhikr* refers to remembering God on a specific occasion, namely during the Pilgrimage at Minā.

Ahl al-Dhimmah (or *Dhimmīs*) are the non-Muslim subjects of an Islamic state who have been guaranteed protection of their rights – life, property and practise of their religion, etc.

Dīn: the core meaning of *dīn* is obedience. As a Qur'ānic technical term, *dīn* refers to the way of life and the system of conduct based on recognizing God as one's sovereign and committing oneself to obey Him. According to Islam, true *dīn* consists of living in total submission to God, and the way to do so is to accept as binding the guidance communicated through the Prophets.

Fāsiq: transgressor, evil-doer, disobedient. For further elaboration see *Sūrah* 2, n. 33 on p. 58.

Fitnah has been used in the Qur'ān in two meanings. It refers, firstly, to persecution, to a situation in which the believers are harassed and intimidated because of their religious convictions. Secondly, it refers to the state of affairs wherein the object of obedience is other than the One True God.

Ḥadīth: the word *ḥadīth* literally means communication or narration. In the Islamic context it has come to denote the record of what the Prophet (peace be on him) said, did, or tacitly approved. According to some scholars, the word *ḥadīth* also covers reports about the sayings and deeds, etc. of the Companions of the Prophet in addition to the Prophet himself. The whole body of Traditions is termed *Ḥadīth* and its science *'Ilm al-Ḥadīth*.

Ḥajj (Major Pilgrimage) is one of the five pillars of Islam, a duty one must perform during one's life-time if one has the financial resources for it. It resembles '*Umrah* (q.v.) in some respects, but differs from it insofar as it can be performed during certain specified dates of Dhu al-Ḥijjah alone. In addition to *ṭawāf* and *sa'y* (which are also required for '*Umrah*), there are a few other requirements but especially one's 'standing' (i.e. stay) in 'Arafāt during the day-time on 9th of Dhu al-Ḥijjah. For details of the rules of *Ḥajj*, see the books of *Fiqh*.

Ḥurūf muqaṭṭa'āt are a group of letters with which several *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān open. The *muqaṭṭa'āt* were commonly used by the Arabs at the time of the advent of the Prophet (peace be on him) and henee they caused no agitation among the non-Muslim audience of that time. This literary style later fell into disuse and hence the commentators of the Qur'ān have come to disagree regarding their exact signification. It is obvious, however, that deriving guidance from the Qur'ān does not depend on grasping the meaning of these letters.

'Ibādah is used in three meanings: (1) worship and adoration; (2) obedience and submission; and (3) service and subjection. The fundamental message of Islam is that man, as God's creature, should direct his *'ibādah* to Him in all the above-mentioned meanings, and associate none in the rendering of it.

Iblīs literally means 'thoroughly disappointed; one in utter despair'. In Islamic terminology it denotes the *jinn*, who refused the command of God to prostrate before Adam out of vanity. He also asked God to allow him a term when he might mislead and tempt mankind to error. This term was granted to him by God whereafter he became the chief promoter of evil and prompted Adam and Eve to disobey God's order. He is also called *al-Shayṭān* (Satan). He is possessed of a specific personality and is not just an abstract force.

'Iddah denotes the waiting period that a woman is required to observe as a consequence of the nullification of her marriage with her husband or because of the husband's death. For details see verses 2: 228 ff. along with relevant notes.

Iḥrām denotes the state of consecration which is essentially required for performing *Ḥajj* and *'Umrah*. The outward garb which consists in the case of men of just two sheets of cloth instead of tailored clothes is one of the conditions of *iḥrām* but not identical with it. Apart from donning that garb, one is required to pronounce *talbiyah* (*Labbayk Allāhumma Labbayk* . . .).

In the state of *iḥrām* the pilgrim is required to observe many prohibitions; e.g. he may not hunt, shave or trim his hair, shed blood, use perfume, or indulge in sexual gratification.

Iḥsān literally denotes doing something in a goodly manner. When used in the Islamic religious context, it signifies excellence of behaviour arising out of a strong love for God and a profound sense of close relationship with Him. According to a Tradition the Prophet (peace be on him) defined *iḥsān* as worshipping God as though one sees Him.

Īlā' denotes a husband's vow to abstain from sexual relations with his wife. The maximum permissible limit for abstaining from sexual relations in wedlock under such a vow is four months, after which *īlā'* would automatically mean repudiation of the marriage.

Injīl signifies the inspired orations and utterances of Jesus (peace be on him) which he delivered during the last two or three years of his earthly life in his capacity as a Prophet. The *Injīl* mentioned by the Qur'ān should, however, not be identified by the four Gospels of the New Testament which contain a great deal of material in addition to the inspired statements of the Prophet Jesus. Presumably the statements explicitly attributed to Jesus (peace be on him) constitute parts of the true, original *Injīl*. It is significant, however, that the statements explicitly attributed to Jesus in the Gospels contain substantively the same teachings as those of the Qur'ān.

I'tikāf refers to the religious practice of spending the last ten days of Ramaḍān (either wholly or partly) in a mosque so as to devote oneself exclusively to worship. In this state one may go out of the mosque only for the absolutely necessary requirements of life, but one must stay away from gratifying one's sexual desire.

Jāhilīyah denotes all those world-views and ways of life which are based on rejection or disregard of heavenly guidance communicated to mankind through the Prophets and Messengers of God; the attitude of treating human life – either wholly or partly – as independent of the directives of God.

Khalīfah or vicegerent is one who exercises the authority delegated to him by his principal, and does so in the capacity of his deputy and agent. This term has been used in the Qur'ān with reference to man: 'Just think when your Lord said to the angels: Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent on earth . . . ' (2: 30).

Khul' signifies a woman's securing the annulment of her marriage through the payment of some compensation to her husband. For details see *Sūrah* 2, n. 252 (p. 178).

Kufr: its original meaning is 'to conceal'. This word has been variously used in the Qur'ān to denote: (1) state of absolute lack of faith; (2) rejection or denial of any of the essentials of Islam; (3) attitude of ingratitude and thanklessness to God; and (4) non-fulfilment of certain basic requirements of faith. In the accepted technical sense, *kufr* consists of rejection of the Divine Guidance communicated through the Prophets and Messengers of God. More specifically, ever since the advent of the last of the Prophets and Messengers, Muḥammad (peace be on him), rejection of his teaching constitutes *Kufr*.

Kursī, (see verse 2: 255), has been variously interpreted by Muslim scholars. In the opinion of the author, it signifies sovereignty, dominion and authority. As for other Muslim scholars, some have considered it to signify God's knowledge. A number of scholars, however, consider the *Kursī* (literally, that which one sits on) a reality rather than a mere figurative expression. These scholars emphasize, however, that both the nature and modality of God's *Kursī* are not known to man.

Mahr (bridal gift) signifies the amount of payment that is settled between the spouses at the time of marriage, and which the husband is required to make to his bride. *Mahr* seems to symbolize the financial responsibility that a husband assumes towards his wife by virtue of entering into the contract of marriage.

Malak means 'message-bearer' and is used in the Islamic texts for angels.

Ma'rūf refers to the conduct which is reckoned fair and equitable by the generality of disinterested people.

Mīqāt (pl. *mawāqīt*) denotes the points which an outsider intending to perform Pilgrimage may cross only in the state of consecration (*iḥrām*). These points were fixed according to directions from God.

Nasī' was a practice in vogue among the pre-Islamic Arabs: they altered the duration of the four sacred months. Whenever they wished to start fighting or to loot and plunder – and they could not do so during the sacred months – they carried out their expedition in one of the sacred months and then later on compensated for this violation by treating one of the non-sacred months as a sacred month.

Rabb has three meanings: (i) Lord and Master; (ii) Sustainer, Provider, Supporter, Nourisher and Guardian, and (iii) Sovereign and Ruler, He who controls and directs. God is *Rabb* in all the three meanings of the term.

The rationale of the basic Qur'ānic message – 'serve none but God' – is that since God is man's *Rabb* – Lord, Sustainer, Provider, Nourisher, etc. – He alone should be the object of man's worship and service. See, for example, Qur'ān 2: 21.

Raḥīm is from the root *r ḥ m* which denotes mercy. In the Qur'ān this attribute of God has been used side by side with *Raḥmān* (which is also from the same root *r ḥ m*). As such *Raḥīm* signifies God's mercy and beneficence towards His creatures. Moreover, according to several scholars, the word *Raḥīm* signifies the dimension of permanence in God's mercy.

Raḥmān (literally 'merciful') is one of the personal names of God. According to scholars of the Arabic language and some commentators of the Qur'ān, the word has the nuance of intensity regarding Divine Mercy. Thus the word does not just signify the One Who has mercy; it rather denotes the One Who is exceedingly merciful; the One Who is overflowing with mercy for all.

Rak'ah (pl. *raka'āt*) represents a unit of the Prayer and consists of bending the torso from an upright position followed by two prostrations.

Ribā literally means 'to grow; to increase'. Technically, it denotes the amount that a lender receives from a borrower at a fixed rate in excess of the principal.

Rukū' means to bend the body, to bow. This bowing is one of the acts required in Islamic Prayer. Additionally, the same word denotes a certain unit in the Qur'ān. The whole Book, for the sake of the convenience of the reader is divided into thirty parts (*ajzā'*, sing. *juz'*), and each *juz'* consists usually of sixteen *rukū'*.

Sabbath, i.e. Saturday. It was laid down that the Israelites should consecrate that day for rest and worship. They were required to altogether abstain on that day from all worldly acts, including cooking (which they might neither do themselves nor have others do for them).

Shayṭān (pl. *shayāṭīn*) literally means refractory, rebellious, and headstrong. Although this word has generally been used in the Qur'ān for the satans amongst the *jinn*, it is also used occasionally for human beings possessing satanic characteristics.

Shukr means thankfulness. In Islam, it is a basic religious value. Man owes thanks to God for almost an infinite number of things. He owes thanks to God for all that he possesses – his life as well as all that makes his life pleasant, enjoyable and wholesome. And above all, man owes thanks to God for making available the guidance which can enable him to find his way to his salvation and felicity.

Tābi'ūn (sing. *Tābi'ī*), Successors, are those who benefited and derived their knowledge from the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him).

Ṭāghūt literally denotes the one who exceeds his legitimate limits. In Qur'ānic terminology it refers to the creature who exceeds the limits of his creatureliness and abrogates to himself godhead and lordship. In the negative scale of values, the first stage of man's error is *fisq* (i.e. disobeying God without necessarily denying that one should obey Him). The second stage is that of *kufr*, (i.e. rejection of the very idea that one ought to obey God). The last stage is that man not only rebels against God but also imposes his rebellious will on others. All those who reach this stage are *ṭāghūt*.

Taqdīs has two meanings: (1) to celebrate and proclaim holiness; (2) to purify.

Tasbīḥ has two meanings: (1) to proclaim the glory (of God); (2) to exert earnestly and energetically in the service (of God).

[***Ayyām***] ***al-Tashrīq*** signifies four days of the month of Dhu al-Ḥijjah, viz. 10th through 13th.

Tawbah basically denotes 'to come back; to turn towards someone'. *Tawbah* on the part of man signifies that he has given up his disobedience and has returned to submission and obedience to God. The same word used in respect of God means that He has mercifully turned to His repentant servant so that the latter has once more become an object of His compassionate attention.

Thawāb denotes recompense and reward. A major thrust of Islamic teachings is that man should be concerned with the ultimate recompense that he will receive for his deeds. Some of these good or bad deeds might be recompensed in some measure in the present world. However, what is of basic importance is the Next World where the righteous will enjoy lasting bliss and the wicked will suffer lasting punishment.

'Umrah (Minor Pilgrimage) is an Islamic rite and consists of pilgrimage to the Ka'bah. It consists essentially of *iḥrām* (q.v.), *ṭawāf* (i.e. circumambulation) around the Ka'bah (seven times), and *sa'y* (i.e. running) between Ṣafā and Marwah (seven times). It is called minor *Ḥajj* since it need not be performed at a particular time of the year and its performance requires fewer ceremonies than the *Ḥajj* proper.

Biographical Notes

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, d. 68 A.H./687 C.E., a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him), was the most outstanding scholar of Qur'ānic exegesis in his time.

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, d. 65 A.H./684 C.E., was a Companion and son of the conqueror of Egypt who embraced Islam before his father. He was noted for his devotion and learning and prepared one of the first collections of *Ḥadīth*.

'Abd Allāh ibn Jubayr, d. 3 A.H./625 C.E., a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him), participated in the battles of Badr and Uḥud. In the latter battle, in which he was martyred, he was the commander of the archers.

'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, d. 32 A.H./653 C.E., one of the most learned Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him), was noted especially for his juristic calibre. He was held by the Iraqi school of law as one of its main authorities.

'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, d. 9 A.H./630 C.E., was the foremost enemy of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the ringleader of the hypocrites in Madina.

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, d. 73 A.H./692 C.E., a famous Companion and son of the second Caliph, was famous for his piety and for transmitting many Traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him).

Abū Bakr, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Uthmān, d. 13 A.H./634 C.E., was the most trusted Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the first Caliph of Islam. Abū Bakr's wisdom and indomitable will ensured the survival of Islam after the death of the Prophet.

Abū al-Dardā', 'Uwaymir ibn Mālik, d. 32 A.H./652 C.E., was a distinguished Companion who contributed to the collection of the Qur'ān, and was known for his bravery as well as his piety and religious devotion.

Abū Dā'ūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath, d. 275 A.H./889 C.E., was a famous traditionist whose *Kitāb al-Sunan* is one of the six most authentic collections of *Ḥadīth*.

Abū Hurayrah, d. 59 A.H./679 C.E., was a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) who transmitted a very large number of Traditions.

Abū Jahl, 'Amr ibn Hishām ibn al-Mughīrah, d. 2 A.H./624 C.E., was an arch-enemy of Islam throughout his life. He was killed during the Battle of Badr in which he was the leading commander on the side of the Quraysh.

Abū Lahab, 'Abd al-Uzzá ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim, d. 2 A.H./624 C.E., was an uncle of the Prophet (peace be on him). He was, however, one of the fiercest enemies of Islam and the Prophet.

Abū Mūsá al-Ash'arī, 'Abd Allāh ibn Qays, d. 44 A.H./665 C.E., was a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) who embraced Islam in its early years and migrated with other Muslims to Abyssinia. He was later appointed by the Prophet (peace be on him) as governor over Zabīd and 'Adan (Aden); still later he was appointed as governor of Baṣrah, and subsequently of Kūfah. He also served as an arbitrator in the dispute between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah.

Abū Sufyān, Ṣakhr ibn Ḥarb ibn Umayyah, d. 31 A.H./652 C.E., was one of the foremost opponents of Islam and the Prophet (peace be on him) until the conquest of Makka, when he embraced Islam. In subsequent military encounters, Abū Sufyān fought on the Muslim side.

Abū Ṭalḥah, Zayd ibn Sahl ibn al-Aswad, d. 34 A.H./654 C.E., was a Companion noted for his courage and for his skill as an archer. He participated in the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, and in several military expeditions.

Abū Yāsir (ibn Akhṭab), d. 5 A.H./627 C.E., was a prominent Jewish leader in the time of the Prophet (peace be on him). He was the brother of Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, and was as inveterate an enemy of Islam as his elder brother.

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, d. 241 A.H./855 C.E., was the founder of one of the four Sunnī schools of law in Islam. He valiantly suffered persecution for the sake of his religious conviction.

'Ā'ishah, d. 58 A.H./678 C.E., daughter of Abū Bakr, was a wife of the Prophet (peace be on him). She has transmitted a wealth of Traditions, especially those concerning the Prophet's personal life. She was also regarded highly for her mature and sharp understanding of the teachings of Islam.

'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, d. 40 A.H./661 C.E., was a cousin and also son-in-law of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the fourth Caliph of Islam. He was known for his many qualities, especially piety and juristic acumen.

Al-Ālūsī, Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, d. 1270 A.H./1854 C.E., was a leading commentator of the Qur'ān, litterateur, jurist and Sufi of the nineteenth century. His commentary *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* is an encyclopaedic work which continues to command considerable respect.

Anas ibn Mālik, d. 93 A.H./712 C.E., was a distinguished Companion who had the honour of serving the Prophet (peace be on him) for many years.

'Aṭā' ibn abī Rabāḥ, d. 114 A.H./732 C.E., a prominent *Ṭābi'ī* (Successor) of Makka, was a famous jurist.

Al-Barā' ibn 'Āzib, d. 71 A.H./690 C.E., was a Companion who embraced Islam at a tender age, participated in several military expeditions and played significant roles in them.

Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, d. 20 A.H./641 C.E., was a very famous Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) and *mu'adhdhin* (caller to Prayer).

Bishr ibn al-Barā' ibn Ma'rūr, d. 7 A.H./729 C.E., was a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) and a leader of the Banū Naḍlah branch of the Khazraj tribe of Madina. He died after the Battle of Khaybar as a result of having taken a poisonous food which was served to the Prophet (peace be on him) and his Companions by a Jewish woman.

Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, d. 256 A.H./870 C.E., is regarded as the most famous traditionist of Islam, whose work is one of the six most authentic collections of *Ḥadīth*, generally considered by Muslims to be the 'soundest book after the Book of Allah'.

Al-Dārimī, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, d. 255 A.H./869 C.E., was one of the outstanding scholars of *Ḥadīth* whose *Musnad* is highly regarded.

Ḥafṣah, d. 45 A.H./665 C.E., daughter of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, was one of the wives of the Prophet (peace be on him).

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, d. 110 A.H./728 C.E., known primarily for his piety, was a major theologian of Baṣrah during the last decades of the first century of *Hijrah*/seventh century C.E.

Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, d. 5 A.H./626 C.E., was a Jewish chieftain who was intensely hostile to, and engaged in conspiracies against, Islam. He was taken prisoner during the Battle of Qurayẓah and put to death.

Ibn Hishām, 'Abd al-Malik, d. 213 A.H./828 C.E., was an outstanding historian who is best known for his *Sīrah* (Biography) of the Prophet (peace be on him).

Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar, d. 774 A.H./1373 C.E., was a famous traditionist, historian and jurist and the author of one of the best-known commentaries on the Qur'ān.

Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, d. 273 A.H./887 C.E., was a famous traditionist whose collection of Traditions (*Kitāb al-Sunan*) is one of the six most authentic collections of *Ḥadīth*.

Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad, d. 230 A.H./845 C.E., historian, traditionist and the secretary of al-Wāqidī (*s.v.* al-Wāqidī), is known for his *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrá*, a major biographical dictionary of the early period of Islam.

Ibn Sīrīn, Muḥammad, d. 110 A.H./729 C.E., was a noted second generation scholar of Baṣrah, who was especially prominent as a traditionist.

Ibn Taymīyah, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, d. 728 A.H./1328 C.E., was one of the most outstanding theologians and jurists of Islam. His ideas have had an immense impact on Muslims, especially during the last two centuries.

Ibn 'Umar, 'Abd Allāh, d. 73 A.H./692 C.E., a son of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, was an outstanding Companion in his own right, and is renowned for his piety and knowledge.

Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, d. 96 A.H./715 C.E., was the most prominent jurist of Kūfah in the second generation of Islam and played a major role in the development of the Iraqi school of law.

Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, d. 78 A.H./697 C.E., was a Companion who is noted for having transmitted a very large number of Traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him).

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī, d. 370 A.H./980 C.E., was an eminent jurist of the Ḥanafī school of law in his time. He is celebrated for his Qur'ān-Commentary, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, which is an erudite commentary on the Qur'ān from a legal perspective.

Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, d. 3 A.H./624 C.E., was a Jewish chieftain and poet, who used his poetic skill to ridicule and insult the Prophet (peace be on him) and his Companions. He also incited various tribes to fight against the Muslims, and was put to death by the Muslims for his vile hostility.

Khālid ibn al-Walīd, d. 21 A.H./642 C.E., was a military genius of Makka who initially opposed Islam but converted to it before the conquest of Makka. After the death of the Prophet (peace be on him) he played a major role in suppressing the rebellion against Islam.

Makḥul ibn abī Muslim, d. 112 A.H./730 C.E., was a scholar of *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* who, after journeying through different lands, settled in Damascus and was recognized as one of the greatest jurists of Syria in his time.

Mālik ibn Anas, d. 179 A.H./795 C.E., was a famous second Islamic century/eighth century C.E. traditionist and jurist of Madina, and the founder of one of the four Sunnī schools of law in Islam. His *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, a collection of Traditions as well as legal opinions of the jurists of Madina, is one of the earliest extant works of *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh*.

Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, d. 18 A.H./639 C.E., a Companion, was known for his knowledge of Law; he was among those who undertook the collection of the Qur'ān and was appointed by the Prophet (peace be on him) as a judge in Yaman.

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, d. 150 A.H./767 C.E., was one of the distinguished scholars in the field of *Tafsīr* (Qur'ān-Commentary), who has left behind a number of works in the field of Qur'ānic sciences.

Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Nīsābūrī, d. 261 A.H./875 C.E., was one of the greatest scholars of *Ḥadīth*, whose work is one of the six most authentic collections of *Ḥadīth* and ranks second in importance only to that of al-Bukhārī.

Al-Naḍr ibn Ḥārith, d. 2 A.H./624 C.E., was among the staunchest enemies of Islam who personally caused the Prophet (peace be on him) much annoyance. Standard-bearer of the Quraysh in the Battle of Badr, he was taken prisoner and put to death.

Al-Nasā'ī, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī, d. 303 A.H./915 C.E., was one of the foremost scholars of *Ḥadīth* whose *Sunan* is considered one of the six most authentic collections of Traditions.

Al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, d. 671 A.H./1273 C.E., was one of the most distinguished commentators of the Qur'ān. His *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* is not only one of the best commentaries on the legal verses of the Qur'ān but also one of the best *tafsīr* works.

Ṣafīyah, d. 50 A.H./670 C.E., was the daughter of Ḥuyayy (*s.v.* Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab) who converted to Islam from Judaism whereafter the Prophet (peace be on him) took her in marriage.

Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib, d. 94 A.H./713 C.E., was a foremost scholar and jurist of the generation of Successors (*Tābi'ūn*). One of the seven recognized jurists of Madina, he was known for his knowledge of *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* as well as for his piety and devotion.

Sālim, the *mawlá* of Abū Ḥudhayfah, d. 12 A.H./633 C.E., originally a slave of Persian origin, was liberated from slavery by the wife of Abū Ḥudhayfah. Sālim was among the early converts to Islam and ranked among the Companions most noted for their knowledge of the Qur'ān.

Al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs, d. 204 A.H./820 C.E., was the founder of one of the four Sunnī schools of law in Islām.

Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, d. 310 A.H./923 C.E., was a distinguished historian, jurist and Qur'ān-commentator. His major extant works include his commentary *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* and his *Annals*, viz. *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk.*

Ṭā'ūs ibn Kaysān, d. 106 A.H./724 C.E., was a *Tābi'ī* (Successor) who is known for his knowledge of Law and *Ḥadīth*, and for his boldness in admonishing the rulers.

Al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad ibn 'Īsá, d. 279 A.H./892 C.E., was a famous traditionist whose collection of Traditions, *Kitāb al-Sunan*, is considered one of the six most authentic collections of *Ḥadīth*.

Ubayy ibn Ka'b, d. 21 A.H./642 C.E., was a prominent Companion who was knowledgeable about the Scriptures and played a key role in the collection of the Qur'ān.

'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, d. 101 A.H./720 C.E., was an outstandingly pious and just Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty who was also famous for his knowledge and learning.

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, d. 23 A.H./644 C.E., was the second Caliph of Islam under whose Caliphate the Islamic state became increasingly organized and its frontiers vastly expanded.

Umm Salamah, Hind bint abī Umayyah, d. 62 A.H./681 C.E., was one of the wives of the Prophet (peace be on him).

'Uqbah ibn abī Mu'ayṭ, d. 2 A.H./624 C.E., was one of the most inveterate enemies of Islam who were responsible for the cruel persecution of Muslims in Makka.

'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir, d. 58 A.H./678 C.E., was a Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) who later became governor of Egypt.

'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, d. 35 A.H./656 C.E., was a son-in-law of the Prophet (peace be on him) and the third Caliph of Islam under whose reign vast areas were conquered and the Qur'ān's present codex was prepared.

Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, d. 207 A.H./823 C.E., was one of the earliest and most famous Muslim historians, who was known especially for his *Maghāzī*, a biography of the Prophet (peace be on him).

The Ẓāhirīs constitute a school of law in Islam which was founded by Dā'ūd ibn Khalaf, d. 207 A.H./884 C.E. The characteristic of the school is that it considers legal injunctions to consist merely of clear statements embodied in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and is strongly opposed to *ra'y*, *qiyās*, *istiḥsān*, etc., which are accepted in varying degrees as valid sources of laws by the jurists of other schools of Islamic Law. This school did not attain much popularity among Muslims and hardly exists today though in the fifth Islamic century/tenth century C.E. it found a very brilliant and erudite representative in Ibn Ḥazm, d. 456 A.H./994 C.E., of Spain.

Zayd ibn Thābit, d. 45 A.H./665 C.E., was a prominent Companion of the Prophet (peace be on him) who played a major role in the collection of the Qur'ān.

Al-Zuhrī, Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihāb, d. 124 A.H./721 C.E., was an outstanding early second Islamic century/eighth century C.E. scholar of Madina who left an indelible impression on *Ḥadīth* and *Sīrah*.

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